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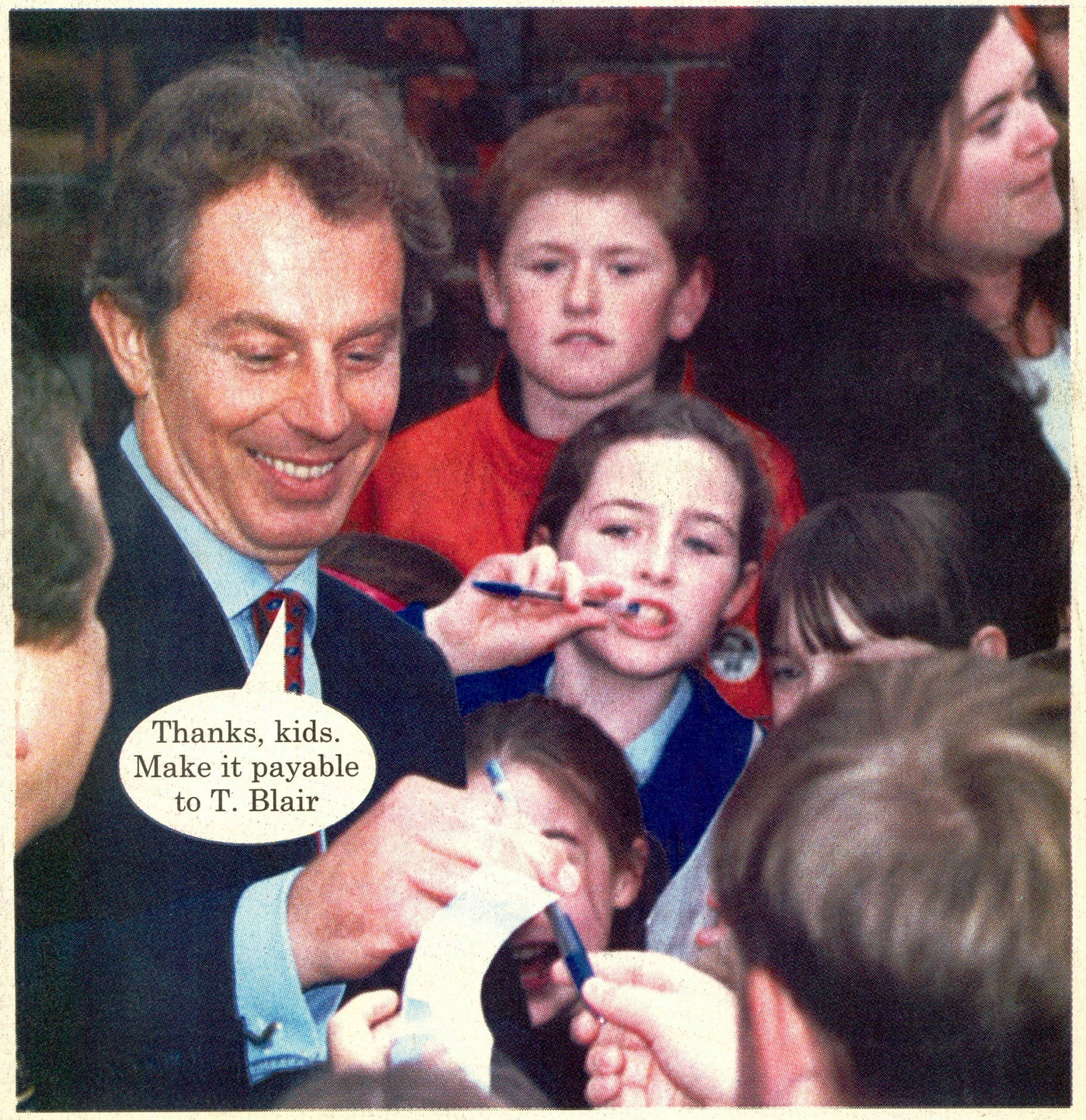

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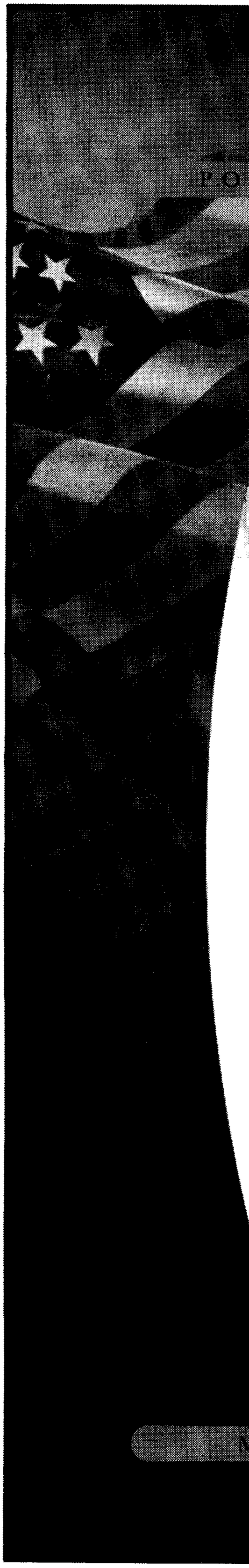

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MAIL ORDER WORLDWIDE

Gnome

THE suggestion that the private dinner given at my Chelsea mansion in 1999 and hosted by my wife, Sally Greenback, was in some way a "birthday party" for Mr Peter Mandelson is a disgraceful slur on a well-loved public servant, ie myself.

The fact that a huge cake in the shape of the Millennium Dome was wheeled in bearing the legend "Happy Birthday, Peter" was purely coincidental, as was the emergence from the cake of the scantily clad figure of Sir Elton John singing "There is nothing like a Dome".

The bid by my company Gnomacy to turn the site of the Dome into a huge amount of money *(Surely 'hi-tec business park'? E.S.)* had nothing whatever to do with the above.

Mr Mandelson, as is well known, has no influence on government policy apart from his close relationship with the Prime Minister who has kindly allowed me to pay for the Dome on HP: 5p a year over the next Millennium.

It is scandalous in this day and age that one cannot have a private dinner to butter up a minister without it appearing in the paper.

E. Strobes
pp Lord Gnome
The Millennium Gnome
Greedwich

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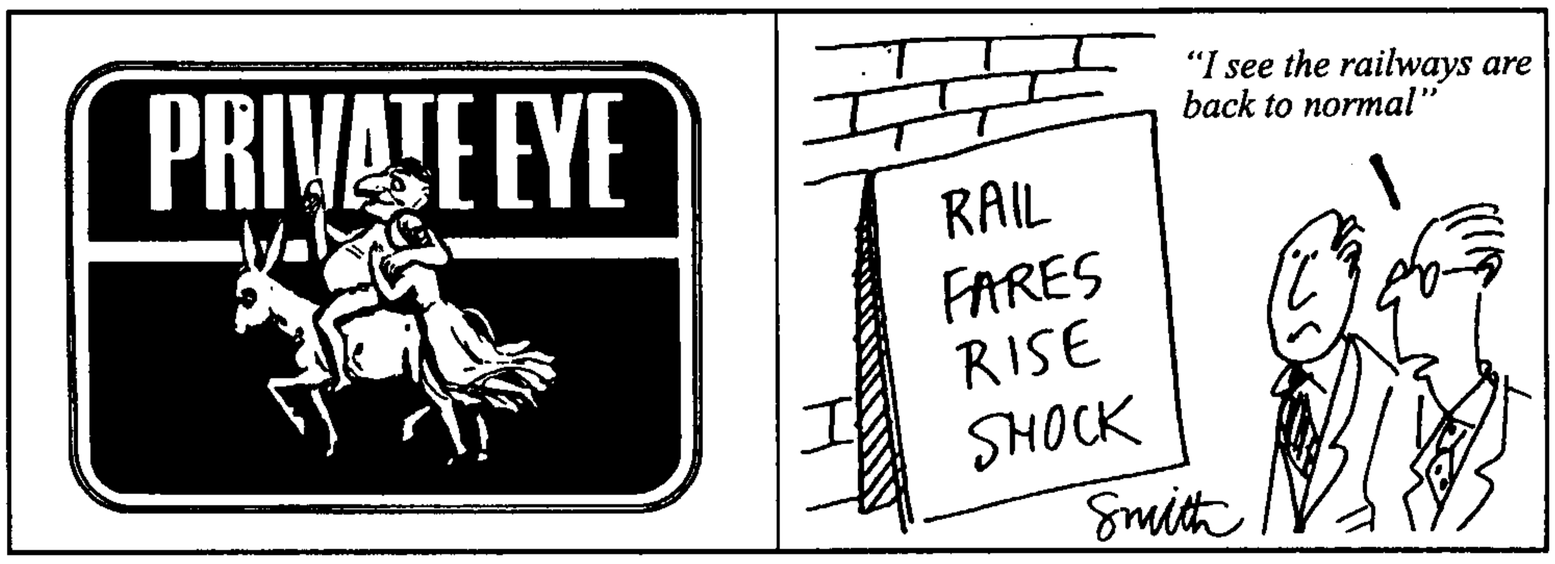


IN THE TEAROOM

EVEN AS Tony Blair was telling David Frost that the Tories were "hopeless" last Sunday, Labour backbenchers returning to Westminster after the hols were being given strict instructions not to say that the election was in the bag. From now until polling day Millbank wants the voters' minds to be in a permanent state of oscillation between a presumption that Labour are going to win and the fear that the Tories might just make a last-minute comeback.

This kind of doublethink is difficult enough to orchestrate on a national scale at the best of times, but William Hague and his shadow cabinet's pisspoor performance hasn't helped. There's no point spending the Ondaatje/Hamlyn/Sainsbury largesse on a poster campaign aimed at evoking memories of negative equity and recession when no one thinks the Conservative Party has a prayer. Through their own incompetence the Tories are playing havoc with "new" Labour's message grid.

But they are not the only ones. Blair's closest cronies in Downing Street – Anji Hunter, Sally Morgan and David Milliband – have been brainstorming for months to come up with a way of fighting the election that makes Tony, and not Chancellor Gordon Brown, the hero of the hour. Blair himself chipped-in with a set of high falutin' "visions" that he thought the electorate might be really interested in. But all that's been consigned to the waste-paper basket now that Phillip Gould has come back from the US with "ten lessons from the Al Gore fiasco". Lesson one is: if you have an economy to boast about, boast. Lesson Two is: cut the crap. That puts Gordon right back in the driving seat.

'Urquhart'

IT HAS BEEN an unhappy New Year for Scotland's foreign-owned fake fish farmers and their friends in high places. Studies showing farm salmon can contain 10 times higher levels of life-threatening dioxins than wild fish has plunged this dirty business into meltdown mode.

The dioxin report will not come as a surprise to Eye readers. Eighteen months ago Old Trout noted that "Scottish fishery scientists have known since 1995 that farm fish contained high levels of dioxins, from dioxin-contaminated fish meal fed to them, and the most prominent contaminant was DDT." (*Eye* 987.)

Rather than welcome EU proposals to reduce dioxin levels, Ian Davies, a senior Scottish government scientist at the marine lab in Aberdeen told an aquaculture conference in Canada that if EU dioxin proposals were implemented "it could mean the end of salmon farming". He asked delegates to do everything they could to help avert this prospect. As the latest food safety scandal grows, government officials charged with regulating the industry are trying to cover their backsides and gag potential "whistle blowers".

Dioxins are not the only problem. More than 1000 tonnes of fish food at a Norwegian plant was found to be infected with salmonella bacteria in November; probably caused by a delivery of fish refuse containing seagull droppings being processed at too low a temperature. Fish guts and blood is regularly sent from Scotland to Norway for processing (*Eye* 1017) then fed back to fake salmon.

With the net of public scrutiny closing round them the fish farmers have adopted the "precautionary principle". Seap (Scottish environment pollution agency) has been deluged with applications for the use of additional toxic chemicals and increased production. With an independent inquiry into the industry due to commence later this year they hope to pre-empt any moratorium on expansion of their businesses.

SO FAREWELL THEN, George Carman QC. Although he represented scoundrels such as Mohamed Fayed, he remained a good friend to the *Eye*, always eager to exchange gossip over a drink or three. At an *Eye* lunch shortly before the Hamilton/Fayed libel trial, he agreed wholeheartedly when it was put to him that his client was at least as big a villain as Hamilton, if not bigger. Indeed, he added, this proposition would be one of the main planks of his ingenious defence.

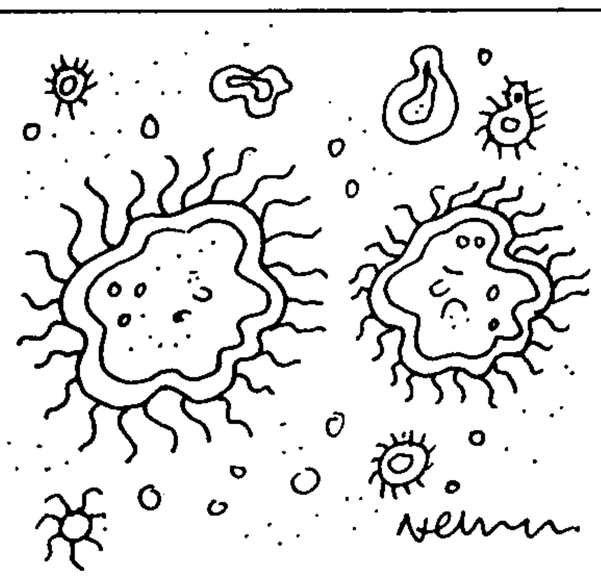
George enjoyed representing newspapers, but hated losing. Knowing how dependent they were on him, he would sometimes use this power to force them into a settlement when he reckoned their case was weak or shameful – most notably when the *Sunday Times* hired him to defend a libel suit brought by Carmen Proetta, against whom the paper had run a discreditable smear campaign following the Gibraltar shootings. Carman's refusal to let the case go to court provoked hysterical grief and fury in the *ST*'s legal manager Alastair Brett, thus earning him the nickname of "Blubber Brett" by which he has been known ever since.

One reason why hacks liked Carman was that he was a kind of honorary hack himself – boozy, funny and congenitally indiscreet. When he was acting for Fayed against the magazine *Vanity Fair*, he bumped into the mag's London editor, Henry Porter, at a party, and (after a few drinks) couldn't resist boasting about the opening speech he had prepared for the trial. He was so pleased with it that he then proceeded to recite the entire thing there and then. As soon as the performance was over, Porter rushed from the room and started scribbling. Thus it was that by the following morning *Vanity Fair*'s lawyers had a nearly complete text of Carman's address. It may or may not be a coincidence that the Phoney Pharaoh abandoned the libel suit shortly afterwards.

IT HAS become something of a new year tradition for the *Independent* to make a fearless attack on the honours system.

Here is the *Indie* leader of 31 December 1998, for example, in the first year of Simon Kelner's editorship: "New Labour's failure to change [the honours system] radically is a sign that the whole idea has become obsolete. The mantra of 'modernisation', repeated so often, does not seem to extend to this list, grey and uninspiring beyond the facade of celebrity..."

Kelner had planned to return to the attack when this year's list was announced on 30 December. In the event, not a word about the honours system appeared in the *Indie* leader column. Surely it can have had nothing to do with an item in that day's paper which began: "Dr A J O'Reilly, the executive chairman of Independent News and Media, parent company of *The Independent,* has been made a knight bachelor in the New Year Honours List..."?



"I couldn't get into hospital – they're full up"

Street Of Shame

THE REBELLION among Dirty Desmond's hacks at the *Daily Sexpress* went public last Saturday with an editorial on organic farming, which was carefully crafted so that the first letter of every sentence spelt out the message FUCK YOU DESMOND.

The only silver lining for Despot and his henchmen was that they could lay the blame at the door of outgoing editor Rosie Boycott and thus fire her without a penny of the £350,000 payoff she was demanding. But alas for the cash-strapped proprietor, neither Boycott nor her deputy Chris Blackhurst had been in the office the day the leader was penned, having decided to use up their entitlement of days off before quitting. The man in charge of the clattering train who approved the editorial was Chris Williams, the newspaper's soft-touch number three, whom Desmond had hoped to appoint as editor once he had ousted Boycott and Blackhurst.

Williams seems likely to join his editor and deputy editor at the Job Centre within days, but his chances of departing with a payoff have vanished. Fearful *Express* hacks now await the arrival as editor of Jonathan Holborow, the thuggish former editor of the *Mail on Sunday*, who is already a member of Despot's "editorial panel". Holborow has told the paper's editorial director Paul "I-don't-know-anything-about-newspapers" Ashford that he will happily fire as many journalists as Desmond requires (at least 100) so long as he can have the editor's chair for the next couple of years in an attempt to wreak revenge on *Mail* editorial supremo Paul Dacre, who forced him out of the *MoS*.

***EXPRESS* hacks yearn to know more about the past of one of their new bosses, Martin "Rottweiler" Ellice, who is joint managing director of Northern & Shell and a key director of Desmond's main porn company, Portland Investments.**

They are particularly curious about an unfortunate "accident" some years ago. When quizzed about it, his fellow henchman Paul Ashford replies only that "it's not as serious as it sounds".

The usual fiver is offered for further details (date, location, documentary evidence, etc).

STEPHEN POLLARD, author of the *Express*'s now celebrated "Fuck you Desmond" editorial, may not realise that he is merely maintaining a long tradition of clandestine abuse of Richard Desmond and his lackeys.

This began back in the 1980s, when an issue of *International Musician* had a big feature in which emboldened drop letters spelled out the legend "MARTIN ELLICE IS A CUNT". Other Northern & Shell titles then followed the example, hiding the message "RICHARD DESMOND IS THE ANTICHRIST" in 2-point type at 30 per cent grayscale along the margins [technical note: very small and hard to read]. Probably the finest achievement was working an upside-down photo of the N&S tower distorted by Photoshop into the background of an article about lesbian analingus with the legend "Welcome To The Arsehole Of The World".

ONE OF the most illuminating contributions to the whole "breast implants at 16" debate came from the *Sun's* agony aunt, "Dear" Deidre, who asked: "Where is this trend towards a Barbie-doll culture going to end up?"

With considerable moral wisdom, Dear Deidre opined: "Of course there are people who make their living out of their looks. But a very dangerous living that can be for those thrown into that world too young... That is because they have been encouraged to value themselves for their appearance rather than their inner worth as an individual."

Now turn to the *Sun* page 3 for pictures of Jakki, 22, Leilani, 20, Nicola, 19, *ad infinitum*.

A TREMENDOUS scoop dominated the *Sunday Telegraph*'s front page on Christmas Eve: "Revealed: the £170,000 tiara worn by Madonna." Noting sniffily that other newspapers had "speculated inaccurately about the tiara that Madonna would wear for the wedding", the paper carried an exclusive photo of the bauble which Asprey had generously loaned her for the big day, plus an exhaustive description. ("The tiara was made in approximately 1910 from 765 old cut diamonds weighing 78 carats and a further two larger diamonds totalling 2.50 carats..." etc etc.)

After plenty more in the same vein, and a lot of guff about Asprey's distinguished history and glamorous clientele, the paper reported that the tiara would be returned to the Bond Street jewellers after Christmas. "When it goes back on sale, it will not be billed as the tiara worn at Madonna's wedding, on the grounds that this would be vulgar."

Indeed. But no more vulgar, surely, than running a shameless front-page ad for an expensive bit of jewellery and the firm which is selling it. Asprey must have been delighted – and no one more so than the firm's chief executive Rosa Monckton, whose husband happens to be Dominic Lawson, the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Can *Telegraph* readers now expect similar "news" stories about Asprey's exciting new range of upmarket kitchen utensils, Nigellaware – designed by and named after Dominic's sister?

Mad cow talks

Huddersfield Daily Examiner

THE Lunchtime O'Boozes of the Street of Shame were worryingly well behaved during the Christmas party season: very few fisticuffs, and hardly any falling over.

Happily, however, their female colleagues are making up for it. After the *Sunday Telegraph* party no fewer than two ambulances were called – one to rescue a hackette who had been found sprawled on a lavatory floor wearing nothing but a pair of high heels, and the other to stretcher out her colleague who was lying face down and unconscious in a lake of vomit.

THAT custodian of the nation's morals, the *Daily Mail*, wasted little time turning its fire on the new proprietor of Express Newspapers, Richard "Fuck you" Desmond. The *Mail* – which just happens to be the *Express*'s main competitor, has branded Desmond one of the country's "most prolific peddlers of pornography". "He is," thundered a recent leading article, "Desmond the degrader!"

The *Mail* claimed Desmond, owner of titles including *Asian Babes* and *Big Ones*, also owns a company with a registered live sex website, featuring the unwholesome delights of "Anal Annie", a 78-year-old pensioner from Southampton. But just how innocent is the *Daily Mail,* and its parent company Associated Newspapers? An answer may be gleaned from a recent issue of "Hot Tickets", the free listings magazine which accompanies the London *Evening Standard* (prop. Associated Newspapers). Here are just some of the delights on offer for readers of Hot Tickets; "Hot Gay Chat... Phone the Hard Line [geddit!] ... Cheap Chat – Alternative Line, Gay/Bi Men and Women/Transvestite/ Transsexual ... Hard-Up - A little bit of what you fancy does you good - call now!" And above a gorgeous pouting stunna: "Hot 'n' Wet - Pull the hottest girls online now!"

Whatever does Lynda Lee Potter make of it all?

IN ITS New Year's Eve editorial the *Mail on Sunday* took one last swipe at the Dome – "this £750m white elephant". Curiously, however, another great British disaster of the year went unmentioned.

No doubt the paper hopes that its readers have forgotten the piece it ran on 26 March last year, hailing the huge and expensive Team Philips catamaran as "a social phenomenon, a far more resonant symbol of New Britain than the Millennium Dome. It transcends age, class, creed. It has a natural symmetry, aligning the promise of the future with the traditions of the past...The nation has something of which to be proud."

And where is it now, this proud and resonant alternative to the Dome? At the bottom of the ocean, having fallen to bits on its maiden voyage.

WHAT better antidote to a cold wet British January than pictures of a sun-kissed beach in Barbados, or a luxury yacht moored off the cost of Thailand, and who better to take them than the *Eye's* favourite non-paparazzo, Jason Fraser?

After gracing the pages of the *News of the World* with shots of Lady Victoria Hervey's rear on 31 December 2000, Fraser did not have far to look for his next snap. Michael Winner's column in the *Screws* on the same day was penned from Barbados, and sure enough, three days later snaps of the mountainous bellied one accompanied by two bikini-clad It girls (Lady Hervey again and Winner's Bulgarian girlfriend, Miss Hristova) appeared in the *Mirror*. Without pausing long enough to screw the cap back on his long lens, Fraser then jetted off to the Thai island of Phuket for some suggestive photos of Prince Andrew with scantily-clad lovelies. Fraser's blurred pics of the prince sunbathing with a group of friends of both sexes provided all the excuse editors needed to splash with corny headlines such as "Andy's topless harem" and "Randy Andy gets frisky with mate's wife" (both in the *Mirror*). Any insinuation that the prince was flirting with married supermodel Normandie Keith will surely prove to have about as much substance as last year's rumours of an affair with 24-year-old PR girl Caroline Stanbury. These were largely based on one of Fraser's pictures in the *Mail* which showed Andrew on a beach in St Tropez in the company of a blonde, identified in the text as Ms Stanbury. The following day the *Mail* was forced to publish an embarrassing apology: "A picture we carried with our report on Prince Andrew's holiday in St Tropez yesterday was wrongly identified as being of Caroline Stanbury, when in fact it was of Annabel Bond, who is not a close friend of the prince."

RICHARD DESMOND's filthy phonelines and websites have attracted much attention, but surely the decision of a company called iTouch to desecrate Christmas was much worse.

While other organisations supply irritating TV themes or chart hits as mobile phone ringtones, iTouch introduced "Twisted Tunes" at a very seasonable £1 per minute. Those advertised included "Frisky the Snowman", "Dongle Bells", "Jingle Bell Jock", "Let It Blow" and, er, "Santa's Coming" (the latter having nothing to do with chimneys).

Readers will recall that iTouch is one of the many ventures associated with Tony O'Reilly and his batman Ivan Fallon. Together they floated part of iTouch on the London Stock Exchange last year, promising an exciting new world in which millions would download the Janet Street-Porter column and other Indie delights onto their WAP phones, thus making huge profits for shareholders.

The sudden lurch towards Dongle Bells rather than David Aaronovitch suggests that economic reality, not to mention desperation in setting in. The comatose share price would support this theory.

AS managing editor of the *Independent*, not to mention a respectable wife and mother, Jan Thompson is not used to receiving jocular emails from her mates describing her as a "fucking slag", jokes about sticky fingers and graphic accounts of how pissed the author was last night.

On the other hand, Jonathan Thompson, the most junior of junior reporters on the *Independent on Sunday*, does not usually receive toadying emails from hacks who want a pay rise or a promotion. But then both might have expected that when the *Indie*'s IT department reorganised the paper's email system, account might have been taken of the fact that there are two J Thompsons on the staff.

OVER Christmas the *Observer* ran a feature by Euan Ferguson listing "100 Things To See The Back of in 2001". Number 91 was "newspapers doing 'My Train Hell' pieces from Penzance to John O'Groats, just to get an uppity junior reporter out of the office for a few days".

Elsewhere in the same section was a half-page news story by junior reporter Nick Paton Walsh, titled "My 26-hour Inter-Cities Special", minutely detailing his "nightmare assignment" of travelling from Inverness to Brighton – accompanied by a photo of young Paton Walsh standing on a platform and looking decidedly "uppity".

Could the two by any chance be related?

THE *Independent on Sunday* has been running a dogged campaign in recent months which features the inconveniences and indignities heaped upon Britain's hard-pressed travellers by rail and bus. Typical stories in "Passenger Power" have included a reader's nightmare train journey from London to Edinburgh and a family whose 15-mile Christmas shopping trip by bus was beset by breakdowns and delays.

Somewhat beyond this worthy but mundane territory was a long first-person account last Sunday by one Michael Williams, about how his "adventure of a lifetime" honeymoon in Venezuela had been spoiled after a bag containing many of the couple's clothes had failed to arrive at Caracas airport. Williams fulminated about how Venezuelan officials had treated him with shoulder-shrugging indifference, about how there was not a branch of Gap or Next to be found in Caracas and how, worst of all, the airline, KLM, had refused to grant Williams and his wife Melanie an upgrade on the flight home.

Despite this harrowing saga occupying half a page in the *Sindie*, there was no room, apparently, to explain that Michael Williams is the deputy editor of that newspaper, or that he was editing the paper last week as Janet Street-Porter was on holiday. Nor that his attempt to get an upgrade had included a call from Caracas to Street-Porter's secretary in Docklands, demanding that the *Sindie* put pressure on KLM. Nor, indeed, that Street-Porter's response had been commendably brief: "Tell him to fahk off!"

OBN SPECIAL

***EYE* readers will recall the disastrous raid on Blantyre House jail last year by a goon squad of prison officers called the "Chaucer team" – a raid which earned prison service director-general Martin Narey a severe rebuke from MPs on the home affairs committee.**

Observer readers probably remember it too, since their newspaper has run several hard-hitting pieces on the subject. So they may have been slightly surprised to read a news story by chief reporter Jason Burke on Christmas Eve, paying fulsome tribute to the great work of the Chaucer squad in rooting out "illegal activities" within jails.

They would be even more surprised if they saw the letter Burke sent to the director-general shortly afterwards:

"Dear Mr Narey, I am writing to thank you for your time last week. It was absolutely invaluable as far as I was concerned and I appreciate you finding a moment at a time of year when you must be fabulously overworked... I hope you were happy with the piece that appeared in the paper. I think it made many of the points you mentioned to me strongly and with some prominence. I hope that your experience of the Observer on this occasion will go some way towards repairing damage done previously. As I promised I have raised the points over publishing letters and other matters that you mentioned with the right people here..."

Alas, it is too late for the aptly named Burke to win anything in the What The Papers Say awards. But Lord Gnome is happy to present the wretched hack with the Order of the Brown Nose in recognition of his shameless arslikhan.

LOTTERY UPDATE

THE CELEBRATIONS at Camelot in the wake of its triumph over Beardie to keep hold of the National Lottery licence are unlikely to be long-lived.

In its winning bid Camelot (and indeed Branson) promised to increase ticket sales by 50 per cent. The first two games of 2001 do not bode well for this ambition. The first Wednesday draw of the year was the lowest ever Wednesday sale, while the much-vaunted Big Draw 2001 attracted even fewer punters. The Big Draw was expected to rake in £80m in sales, instead it took just under £25m. Camelot officials, so-recently jubilant, must now be praying that the lottery does not turn into Dome mark two.

HACKWATCH

2001: A Space Filler

ACCORDING to Professor Carey Cooper, most of us return to work after the New Year with "post Bank Holiday depression syndrome". And nowhere is the depression deeper than in Fleet Street editorial conferences: so much space to fill, so little to write about. But then an idea forms in the features editor's mind. What do people do over Christmas? Eat too much! So what do they want now? DIETS!

Better still, CELEBRITY DIETS! The *Sun* did its best to interest us in how twins Heidi and Kim Young shed 12 stone between them in just 16 months, but, frankly, who's interested in a couple of girls from Fife who work in a chip-shop? The *Sunday Mirror*'s headline was even less appealing: "Watch our diet.com: Millions will see six women fight the flab live on the Internet." Strictly for fans of Richard Desmond's *Horny Housewives*, one suspects.

No, we want Vanessa Feltz and Carol Vorderman. Both have shed a lot of weight in the past year and are now cashing in by promoting their slimming videos, in the *Mail* and the *Mirror* respectively. Vanessa's is called *If I Can, You Can*. Can what? Get slimmer by losing your husband and having a fling with your personal trainer, as Vanessa has done? Oddly enough, Carol Vorderman also separated from her husband last year, but neither the *Mirror* nor the *Mail* is tasteless enough to draw the obvious conclusion that a marital bust-up is the best way of losing weight.

Vanessa's "exclusive" revelation is that "the best way to shift pounds and inches is to combine a fat-burning exercise regime with a healthy, low-fat diet". Who would have thought it? Eat plenty of fruit compote, or fresh dates stuffed with Quark, and get ready to burn the flab the Feltz way: "Pivoting on your right foot, step out and in with your left foot four times at 90-degree intervals, so you turn a full circle to the right. Bring your left foot in to meet your right between each step and raise your right arm each time you step out."

The results of all this pivoting are plain to see. "Vanessa Feltz has a new chap, a new body and a new life," Lynda Lee-Potter gushes in an accompanying interview. "She walks into the Milestone Hotel in Kensington and looks not only a different shape from the old Vanessa but a different person. She's wearing hair extensions which flow down her back and she has long false nails." Presumably she takes them off before stepping on to the scales.

Not to be outdone, the *Mirror* introduces gorgeous pouting Carol Vorderman. "Her slinky fuchsia dress clings to her slender figure like a second skin," it drools. "Her complexion glows, her eyes sparkle and she's brimming with the energy of a teenager. She looks ready to take on the world... yet, amazingly, she never goes to the gym, doesn't have time to exercise, and she never goes hungry." If the *Mirror* is to be believed, "thousands of people" have stopped Carol in the street to ask how she came to look so fabulous.

The alluring gimmick of the Vorderman diet is that you don't have to watch the calories or take any exercise. "It turns all those rubbishy Eat-Nothing-But-Pineapple dieting fads on their heads," she boasts in the *Mirror*. "This is not about counting calories. It's not about eating less. It's about eating more!" However, closer inspection of the small print reveals that followers of the Vorderman plan must forswear alcohol, tea, coffee, meat, fish, eggs, pasta, cheese. So what *can* you have? Pumpkin seeds, millet, dandelion tea, sesame seeds, grilled vegetables, rice milk and, er, more pumpkin seeds. No, it isn't one of those rubbishy Eat-Nothing-But-Pineapple fads; it's an Eat-Nothing-Much-Except-Seeds diet.

Alas, it seems that no one at the *Mirror* bothered to warn hackette Michelle Kirsch of the Vorderman serialisation. On 2 January, while Carol was babbling about the joys of pumpkins and millet elsewhere in the paper, Kirsch's regular "Health Monitor" column warned that detox diets may be "fine for people who live on Planet Me, but not so practical for those of us who have jobs and a life. And you will feel worse before you feel better... It can involve headaches, nausea, bad breath, spots, loose bowels or constipation, and feeling cold. Some doctors, like GP Catti Moss, say detoxing is tosh: 'People will lose weight and perhaps feel better, but it does not get rid of so-called toxins.'"

Too late. The very next day, thanks to the *Mirror*'s week-long series of free advertisements, *Carol Vorderman's 28-Day Detox Diet* went straight into the video charts at number one.

AD NAUSEAM

AN industry as silly as advertising doesn't really need a silly season, but if there was one it would be now. In the run-up to Christmas adland shoots its collective bolt hawking Christmas gifts and Boxing Day sales, jettisoning any semblance of creativity to scream "cheap, cheap, cheap" from every available media orifice.

This makes January a welcome hiatus in which resting advertisers can slip in a product name change, quietly guillotine a few under-performing lines or call up those consultants to save a few pennies (which can then be spent on hiring more consultants).

But this year the gentle giants of ice cream, Chicken Tonight and multifarious washing powders, Unilever, have truly excelled themselves with a mailshot that manages to combine all of the above with exquisite, some would say astonishing poise.

Addressed from James Hill, the chairman of Lever Bros, to individual customers (names gleaned off supermarket databases, at a cost) it delivered news of seismic significance to a gobsmacked public: "I would like to share some important news with you. From the New Year, Jif Cream will be known by its new name of Cif Cream (with the "C" pronounced as an "S"). This is because Jif is predominantly known as Cif around the world and by adopting our global name we will be able to bring you better value products and more innovations in the future. I am writing to reassure you that although the name has changed, in every other respect Cif Cream is absolutely identical to Jif Cream" and so it went on.

Long-suffering consumers who have lived through the trauma of Oil of Ulay morphing into Oil of Olay, Opal Fruits to Starburst and the much-loved Marathon to Snickers know full well that name changes come about as a result of global realignment which pools packaging and marketing to save the multi-nationals millions. Which makes Unilever's explanation for the move all the more amusing: so they can bring us better value products and more innovations. Innovations like swapping a C for a J, presumably.

One incredulous reader wrote in to ask if this was a spoof. Alas, no. A proud Unilever PR department said the piece was indeed the creation of the top man himself, honed by a brand team and then delivered by Unilever's direct marketing agency MWL.

The television advertising for the new-and-in-no-way-improved Cif is promised at the end of January.

"Ah, the pitter patter of tiny feet"

SURPRISE, surprise! "New" Labour's most recent Tory recruit, Shaun Woodward, used the Christmas break to announce that he would not be contesting his Witney seat at the next election after all.

Since Woodward enjoyed a substantial 7,000-plus majority in the Oxfordshire constituency as a Conservative, his decision was seen by many as a foregone conclusion. Woodward is desperate to land himself a safe Labour seat – and is hoping that the party's Millbank HQ will help secure him one. Already, party officials have swept away the main impediment that is keeping other Labour MPs with marginal seats from joining a "chicken run" to more promising terrain. Two years ago, Labour's ruling NEC expressly forbade such moves. But this apparently doesn't apply to Shaun Woodward. As he was elected to a Conservative seat, and not a Labour one, he falls outside the NEC's ruling! With the NEC soon to decide on a list of candidates "available" for last-minute seats where incumbent MPs make a "last minute decision" to stand down in the "interests of the party" (ie being handed a peerage), Shaun may have his passage eased.

JIM DICKSON, former leader of Lambeth council, has taken another step forward in his quest to become a Labour MP, courtesy of Old Bexley and Sidcup Labour party. It has selected him to contest the seat being vacated by Ted Heath, even though concerns about Dickson's integrity recently thwarted his attempt to be selected to fight the Lib Dem Simon Hughes in North Southwark and Bermondsey at the general election.

North Southwark and Bermondsey Labour party members rejected Dickson after questions were raised about the CV he submitted and about his declaration of interests in Lambeth where he remains a councillor.

Eye 1014 reported how Dickson was recently cleared of any impropriety concerning his decision to declare that he worked as a lobbyist for GJW/BSMG the day before one of its clients, Frogmore Estates, had a planning application for a multi-million development heard by Lambeth council's planning committee in June last year. However, it subsequently came to light that Dickson's CV, submitted in April, had not been updated to include his lobbying work for GJW/BSMG. When quizzed, Dickson claimed that he did not see fit to inform the local party that he had started work as a lobbyist for GJW/BSMG in May, the month after his CV was submitted. A claim which sits most uneasily with the fact that his work number on the CV, submitted in April, is that of GJW/BSMG.

CLARE SHORT, the secretary of state for international development produces a white paper to show how globalisation helps the poor. Her own department, DFID, is making a striking contribution to that effort.

Its website boasts that the department has hired the country's most expensive accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers as consultants on no less than 44 separate projects, costing the taxpayer £44m. A senior partner in PWC is not usually available for less than £400 an hour.

WHEN film-maker Ken Loach appeared on *Desert Island Discs* in April 1999, he told presenter Sue Lawley that he had been offered an OBE, but had turned it down.

Loach expressly asked the programme-makers to broadcast that part of the interview, as he wished to publicise the principle behind his decision. Nevertheless, this intriguing insight into his character was lost to the cutting room floor. Ms Leggie, however, herself received an OBE in the latest new year honours list!

THOSE HONOURS IN FULL

THE New Years Honours list, possibly the last set of gongs dished out before the election, maintained their New Labour flavour – but not because of the assorted teachers, milkmen and humble public servants dotted about the list. These lowly figures are shields to hide the Government's real heroes.

Tucked away in the honours were the usual Blairite obsessions: rewarding the Dome and other failures, Labour backers, arms traders, spooks and privatisers.

High on the Hodge

There has been no more consistent backer of New Labour than the Republican oriented US energy giant, Enron, who have been giving "£5,000 or more" to Labour for the past three years. Labour have responded with a CBE for **Ralph Hodge**, Enron's top man in Europe, for "services to the gas and power industries". One of Hodge's principal "services to the gas industry" has been to overturn Labour's energy policy. When elected, the party was committed to a moratorium on new gas fired power stations, to stop the "dash for gas" which would inevitably destroy coal miners' jobs. Hodge himself said he would use "any channel" to break the policy, including lobbying by President Clinton. Enron were initially allowed exemptions to the moratorium, but these are no longer necessary as the policy has now been completely junked. Hodge is also a board member of Serco, who are bidding for the privatisation of air traffic control. Serco run a number of private prisons in the UK including the troubled "Doncatraz".

Another lucky Labour backer was **Dr Nick Scott-Ram** who got an MBE for "services to biotechnology". Scott-Ram currently works for consultancy Quercus Management Ltd. Four of the five managers of Quercus, including Scott-Ram, formerly held senior positions at the disaster-prone British Biotech.

Go With The Floella

Children's entertainer **Floella Benjamin**'s OBE citation unconvincingly noted her "services to broadcasting". Benjamin was thrust into Tony's gaze more for her work as a millennium commissioner than for her TV appearances. She had special responsibility for the "shared ground" zone of the Dome and was a member of the "litmus group" supposed to ensure that Dome content passed the "acid test" of potential popularity.

Another reward for failure was lavished on **Peter Welsh**, the £133,000 a year director of the Atomic Energy Authority's leaky Dounreay plant . On top of his £15,000 bonus this year he now also has an OBE. Highlights for Doomreay in 1999 included the announcement that while the plant will close in 2004, it will take a further 60 years and £4bn to clean up. Some parts will remain off-limits for 300 years. Just over two weeks before Welsh got his OBE the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency demanded an urgent investigation after another highly radioactive particle was found near the beach at Dounreay .

PFI Payday

Few of the teachers and nurses who voted Labour can have imagined that the change of government would mean that the former head of capital projects at Kleinwort Benson would be in charge of their schools and hospitals. However, that's what happened, and the CBE for ex Kleinwort man **Adrian Montague** for his "services to the private finance initiative" underlines the fact. Montague has been closely involved in Labour's running of the PFI scheme, whereby public services are handed to private firms then rented back at exorbitant rates. Montague is currently deputy chairman of Partnerships UK, the Government's PFI lobbying organisation. In 1997, while working for Gordon Brown, Robinson closed down the old PFI unit at the Treasury in an attempt to revive the Tory scheme. Looking for "the right appointment as chief executive" of a new PFI unit, Robinson was relieved that "we were still able to make an appointment without the complicated procedures that the Nolan committee on standards in public life was about to bequeath us". Instead of "complicated procedures" like open competition, Robinson turned to another businessman, Malcolm Bates. Bates, "drawing on his wide network of City contacts put together a shortlist of three outstanding candidates". Robinson was very impressed, believing "Malcolm did an astonishing job putting together the list in a matter of 10 days" Of Bates's three friends, Robinson picked Montague.

Gong-Ho

High tech arms exporters and the private firms running Britain's nuclear military complex were first in the queue for honours. British Aerospace bagged their customary brace of medals. **John Jeremy Cockburn**, BAe's Canadian operations director got an OBE. **Ian Ansell**, BAe senior systems engineer and **Frank Moyes**, BAe Trident navigation team leader both got MBEs. **Julian Blogh**, chief exec of Ultra Electronics , who make the high-tech kit in many BAe and other warplanes, got a CBE. **Kenneth Snell** of Fleet Support Ltd, a joint BAe/Vosper Thorneycroft firm, won an MBE. **Alan Vincent**, head of engineering for military helicopter and armoured car maker GKN also won an MBE, as did **Ronald Barnes**, retiring technical director of high-tech military kit-maker, Systems Engineering & Assessment Ltd. **David Hirst**, engineering director of Wardle Storeys, manufacturer of parachutes and military inflatables, got an OBE. Even **Alun Jones**, head of the Institute of Physics, got his OBE for "services to the defence industry".

Spooky

Unnoticed by the media, the list of CBEs included one **Robert Ward**, described merely as "senior civil servant (legal), ministry of defence". Ward is in fact the chief legal adviser to MI5 and thus responsible for the hamfisted campaign against David Shayler, which threatens to cause the security service yet more embarrassment when Shayler stands trial at the Old Bailey later this year.

Meanwhile, in the diplomatic list, one **John McLeod Scarlett** collects a CMG to add to the OBE he received in 1987. As with Ward, his official description ("counsellor, FCO") is too modest by half. Scarlett was in fact the MI6 chief of station at the British embassy in Moscow until March 1994, when the Russians finally lost patience with his James Bond antics and expelled him from the country. The last straw was his recruitment of a Russian arms industry official, Vadim Sintsov, whom he provided with invisible ink, secret radios and £8,000 in cash in return for secret intelligence about weapons deals.

After his arrest Sintsov claimed that he had been "blackmailed" into spying for British intelligence. A Moscow military tribunal sentenced him to 10 years' hard labour in a "strict regime" camp and confiscation of all his property. Even so, he will surely rejoice to learn that the man responsible for his plight is now a Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George.

Services To Thatcherism

Julian Robert Seymour was awarded a CBE "for public service". Behind this bland announcement lay Blair's truest love. Julian Seymour has since 1991 been the director of Lady Thatcher's private office. The Cabinet Office confirmed that Seymour's CBE was for service to Thatch, in particular his organisation of her many trips abroad. Seymour is also a director of Chime PLC, the firm that owns Bell Pottinger, the Thatcherite PR outfit which transferred so smoothly into New Labour's orbit.

Curse of Blair

THE POLICEMAN who arrested Euan Blair has himself now been arrested, in a "distressed state". According to the *Mail on Sunday*, the 25-year-old PC had been "under pressure" ever since nabbing the PM's son in Leicester Square last summer.

This news comes only a week after the revelation that Thameslink trains have sacked Arthur Harriott, the ticket inspector who charged Cherie Blair a £10 penalty fare last year for travelling to Luton without a ticket. As Harriott told the *Sunday Telegraph*: "Her life has gone on as normal while mine has been ruined by one incident in which I did everything correctly."

No doubt police officers and other public servants will bear this in mind before attempting to enforce the law against a member of the Blair family in future.

COURT CIRCULAR

SIMON WALKER, the Queen's spin doctor, has hit on an unusual idea that is bound to get him thrown out of Alastair Campbell's inner circle. He has decided to let Brenda do her own thing.

In less than six months as royal spinner, Walker has "gone native", telling friends he is impressed by Brenda's humour (*shome mishtake, shurely? Ed*), her sense of what is "right" and her devotion to duty. Years of trying to package these commodities for the media have clearly failed, so Walker has decided to give her a free hand to see if Brenda *au naturel* can sell the House of Windsor.

This approach was most noticeable in Brenda's Christmas broadcast, which no spinner could have written. The most intensely personal address she has ever given, the Queen herself decided to move from desk to sofa and also returned, bemusedly, to writing the speech herself with the advice of her private secretary, Sir Robin Janvrin. Walker didn't try to write it or edit it, nor did he send Her Maj a list of "bullet points".

In need of a guiding hand after years of being told what to do, Brenda turned to George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was so impressed by the text of her speech he suggested no amendments. It was in fact the sort of traditional sermon that no clergyman would dream of giving on television.

Downing Street did, inevitably, carp about the head of the CofE talking about her faith but was overruled – the only time of the year that Brenda can ignore the politicians.

TUC NEWS

FURTHER evidence of the extent to which Britain's trade union movement has been "modernised" was supplied by TUC general secretary John Monks during a recent dinner at the Grosvenor Hotel, Park Lane to mark the first 150 years of engineering and electrical trade union, AEEU.

Barely a murmur met Monks's opening remarks; "My Lords, Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen..." Perhaps he had meant to say "Brothers and Sisters", but thought twice of it having spotted where the union's top brass, both current and former, were all sitting. Their number included current general secretary, Sir Ken Jackson, and ermine be-decked former general secretaries and presidents, Lord [Frank] Chapple, Lord [Hugh] Scanlon, Lord [Bill] Jordan, Sir [Gavin] Laird and former steel union boss, Lord Brookman.

IN THE COURTS

MAGISTRATES around the country appear to have been a little overzealous in their interpretation of the new human rights legislation.

Benches have been refusing to impose the usual raft of conditions often attached to the granting of bail – such as alchohol and drug bans or curfews – because they may conflict with the offenders' civil rights.

What seems to be taxing magistrates most is Article 7, which says there should be no punishment without due process of law. It seems they are worried about finding themselves up in the High Court for a judicial review for curtailing the freedoms of the as yet unconvicted.

In one of a series of cases reported to the probation officer's union, Napo, a bench in the West Midlands refused to impose curfew conditions on an alleged sex offender. Police and probation had asked for a curfew condition that he stay in a bail hostel during school arrival, lunch and home-time periods. It another case in the West Country, magistrates refused to ban alcohol either inside or outside a hostel, from a man accused of theft, but who had a history of alcohol related offences.

In another they refused to allow bail staff search the room of another man accused of theft, but who had a drug problem. That one was on the grounds of Article 8 and his right to privacy.

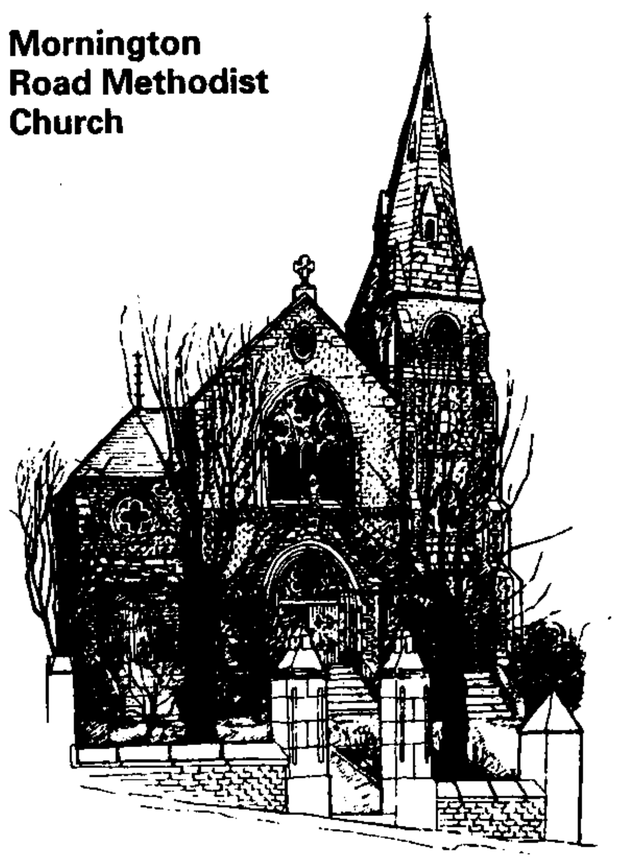
But Napo says the matter must go urgently to the High Court for clarification before the entire bail system is brought into disrepute. The irony is that without conditions, police and probation oppose bail and defendants are remanded into custody – an ever bigger infringement of their liberties.

NOOKS and CORNERS

BINGLEY, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, just a few miles further up Airedale from the magnificent mills at Saltaire, once boasted a magnificent Victorian church. This was Holy Trinity, designed by the great Norman Shaw; but it was blown up in scandalous circumstances in 1974 using the dubious excuse of structural problems with the tall steeple.

Today therefore the finest building on the Bingley skyline is another church, the Mornington Road Methodist Church, built in 1871-74 to the designs of J.P. Pritchett II and paid for by Alfred Sharp JP, a Bingley mill-owner. True, it is not quite of the same standard as Norman Shaw's lost masterpiece; but with its spire it is an important landmark forming part of a group of Victorian civic buildings.

Mornington Road Methodist Church



This church is listed grade II and has been described by Bradford council's planning department as "Bingley's most important listed building". English Heritage considers it "of high quality" and that it "makes a major contribution to the town". Furthermore — unusually for such a building — it is in reasonable structural condition.

And so, in its wisdom, to celebrate the new millennium the Methodist Church is determined to demolish it and replace it with a miserable complex of flats and houses to be erected by Messrs Lemmileg, developers of Wakefield, with, oh yes, a hall masquerading as a new, smaller, nice 'n' cosy Methodist church.

An earlier set of proposals was rejected last year, but the Shipley area planning sub-committee of Bradford council nevertheless acquiesced in the demolition of Mornington Road Methodist Church. Why?

Thirteen years ago the then minister launched a £270,000 appeal to restore the building and adapt it for modern conditions. Just under half that sum was raised and the roof was repaired when, in 1988, disaster struck in the shape of a new and bearded minister, the Rev David Johnson. He had no time for historic buildings, so he soon tried to sell the church for alternative uses and, when that failed, proposed its demolition.

Mr Johnson has now moved on to cause problems elsewhere; but the small Methodist congregation that survives regards the church as "a millstone round our neck" and declines to take any positive action to save it.

The Mornington Road Church Conservation Group is, however, fighting for the building and points out that, under the government's circular PPG 15, the secretary of state "would not expect listed building consent to be granted for demolition unless the authority is satisfied that *real efforts* have been made without success to continue the present use or to find compatible uses for the building".

In this case, despite claims to the contrary, the Methodists have made no new initiative to put the Victorian church on the open market since 1993, when the favoured developer - who wants to demolish it - arrived on the scene. Since then the property market in Bingley has changed for the better and the building would lend itself to internal division and creative adaptation.

The fate of the Mornington Road Methodist Church should be examined at public inquiry. I can only agree with the Ancient Monuments Society when it wrote last year that "the machinery for the protection of listed buildings would have failed dramatically if Mornington Road Church is destroyed. We urge the Secretary of State to intervene". Or, to misquote a famous dramatist who died a century ago, to lose one listed Victorian church in Bingley may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.

IN Eye 1006 I described how Argyll & Bute council planned to spoil the 350-year-old Avenue in the centre of Inveraray and to demolish a (listed) wall to make a car park, so spoiling the special and historic town that visitors come to see. Since then the Friends of Inveraray — founded to resist this brutish proposal — have conducted a splendid campaign to try to persuade the council to behave responsibly.

The Friends have now complained to the local ombudsman about a press release issued by Argyll & Bute council as it "contains an untruth designed to mislead the public". Referring to a "public hearing" on 29 November, this claims that "the area committee members listened to representations from all the interested parties before discussing the application in public. Members then decided to approve the application". But there was no debate or discussion: after representations had been made the chairman immediately moved to approve the application and no other councillor spoke.

Furthermore, the council's head of planning Angus Gilmour told the Oban Times on 7 December that "there are no objections from the statutory consultees" when, in fact, both the Garden History Society and the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland await responses to their expressed concerns. This is another case which ought to be called in for public inquiry.

'Piloti'

"Actually, I live here"

Number crunching

£7,500

■ compensation so far awarded to each family of the victims of the Real IRA bomb which killed 27 in Omagh in August 1998.

£13,000

■ compensation awarded to IRA bomber turned Sinn Fein Stormont assembly member, Gerry Kelly, for injuries received during republican demos in June 1996 and June 2000.

EYE TV

BBC and ITV New Seasons

AS television degenerates, the viewer faces each new year's schedules like one of Liz Taylor's later husbands or Henry VIII's final wives, hoping that the promises will be kept but beginning to discern a pattern of disappointment.

It's worse than ever this time because the first copyright 2001 shows follow the worst televisual Christmas on record. As was pointed out here in the last issue, BBC1 shot its bolt in October, sandbagging the big new commissions around the launch of its new *News At Ten*. Accordingly, Santa's sack was empty and it's impossible to remember an early January with so few new shows on BBC1, and so many repeats.

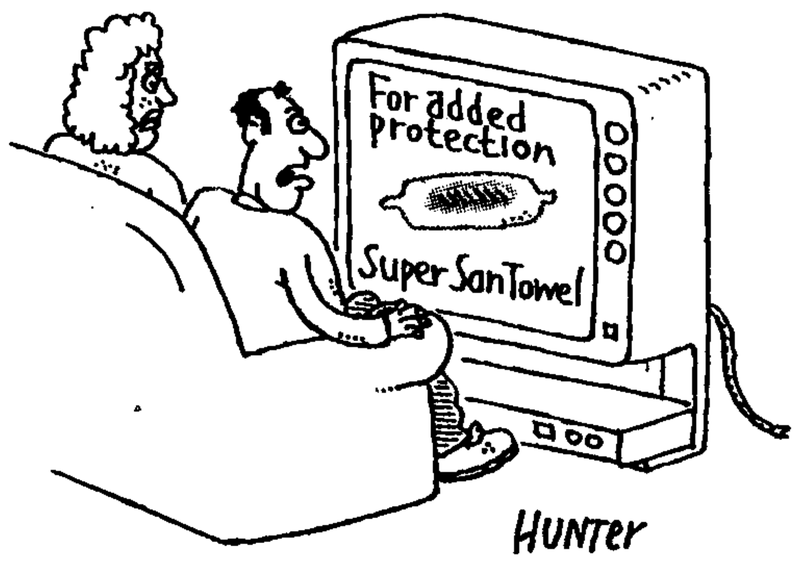
Rebel Heart, the one big new drama, mainly has going for it the momentum of controversy. David Trimble urged Chairman Bland to "rethink the transmission" of an Easter Uprising drama written by Ronan Bennett, a nationalist writer who has become a wanted-poster boy for the *Torygraph* and *Spectator* and a cause-célèbre for the *Grauniad*, not least because Bennett lives with the deputy editor.

But even this will disappoint anyone at the BBC or outside hoping for a Force 12 scandal. Far less tendentious than any of Hollywood's forays into Irish history, *Rebel Heart* is slick, romantic, enjoyable and managed *not* to outrage the historians from both sides who lined up to preview it.

Presumably by coincidence, unless the Blairite virus has now infected everyone, the other BBC1 new drama also shows a famed controversialist failing to deliver on shocks. G.F. Newman, legendary vegetarian and inventor of the hard-bastard police drama with *Law And Order*, has written *Judge John Deed*, in which Martin Shaw plays a high court judge, pursuing a liberal agenda against the efforts of the lord chancellor's department to force his resignation.

This is glossy and funny but a nut cutlet beside the red meat of Newman's early work. The scheduling also shows the new caution in TV drama. Where once this would have been a major series, it's now a pilot, dependent for a return on the ratings it draws.

BBC2, spared service in the "news wars" last year, had the best Christmas of any channel and had the chunkiest first week of January, although mainly through the return of bankers, including the frisky business series *Blood On The Carpet* and the archaeology slot *Meet The Ancestors*.



"Apparently it dates from her Blue Period"

More worryingly the hugely expensive, ten-part drama *In The Land Of Plenty* seems, from the opening episode, to have little going for it. Adapted from a Tim Pears novel which never really took off from the bookshelves, it begins with a confused and self-consciously wacky sequence, a sort of modern-dress *Gormenghast*, which risks losing the audience with nine and half shows still to go.

ITV continues to be the Hyacinth Bucket of channels, desperate to suggest the possession of class. There was much comment last year that the handing out of the first big jackpot on *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* to some posh bint cousin of Camilla's was a terrible accident. But the third channel is still struggling to convince the blue chip advertisers that its viewers aren't all skinning ferrets while wearing flat caps.

So far, *Cold Feet* is its only surefire hit with the Guardian / Gap Kids crowd and it has already been announced that the next series will be the last. *At Home With The Braithwaites*, a black comedy about lottery winners, has been granted a second series and announces its anti-ferret policy with scenes of lesbian sex and brazen hussies declaring: "I'm so bored. I haven't had an orgasm for seven months." Some may take this line as a metaphor for ITV's neurosis about its drama hit-rate.

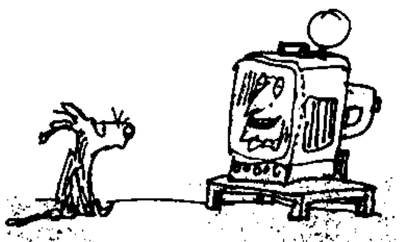
Two of ITV's new year shows, though, suggest that the strategy involves split-level programmes, simultaneously appealing to the flat-cap and Gap Kids sectors of the audience. *The Innocent*, a big two-part drama, has a boffo plot: wife's best friend accuses's BF's husband of rape. Hubby admits to consensual adultery but not rape. The case goes to court. Soap opera and psychological drama alternate like a layer cake, with a complicated outcome hoping to placate both feminists and red-necks.

Another example of this double-think strategy was the documentary *Ken And Me*. This observational film about William Roache of the *Street* and his missus had lashings of *Hello!* magazine insights into the Roache's gracious mock-Barrett home for the *Corrie* fans, but was filmed by Jane Treays, a Channel 4/BBC2 talent whose sly camera-work is intended to allow the more superior viewer to sneer at the supermarket openings and Mrs R's collection of ornamental eggs endorsed by Joan Rivers.

But, while split-level hits occasionally happen accidentally (*Inspector Morse* is a good example), it's difficult to do them deliberately. The risk is that both your target audiences end up feeling irritated by the bits inserted for the other lot. As the Kingsley Amis title advises, You Can't Do Both.

'Square Eyes'

MEDIA NEWS



THE Government's "explanation" for the appointment of Gordon Brown's chum Gavyn Davies as vice chairman of the BBC is most revealing.

Fending off the obvious charges of cronyism, a "spokesman" first suggested that Gavyn "had not been involved in any important political activity in the past five years". But only last summer, Gav chaired the Government's very own review of BBC funding, proposing such uncontroversial and unimportant ideas as the privatising BBC Resources and the flogging off of the Beeb's commercial arms. Ideas that were once political dynamite have now, it seems, lost their power to shock.

"Mr Blair's official spokesman," then added: "If you check with the BBC, you will find that the BBC got the man that they wanted." Quite so. Gav's ideas still have a lot of support among senior BBC figures and his appointment will be seen by some as a green light for change.

GENITAL origami is spreading through the BBC like an embarrassing disease.

Before Christmas BBC Worldwide chief executive Rupert Gavin circulated an email offering discounted seats to the West End show, *Puppetry of the Penis*, in which two Australian blokes perform amazing acts with their, er, dongers (see *Eyes* 1017 & 1018).

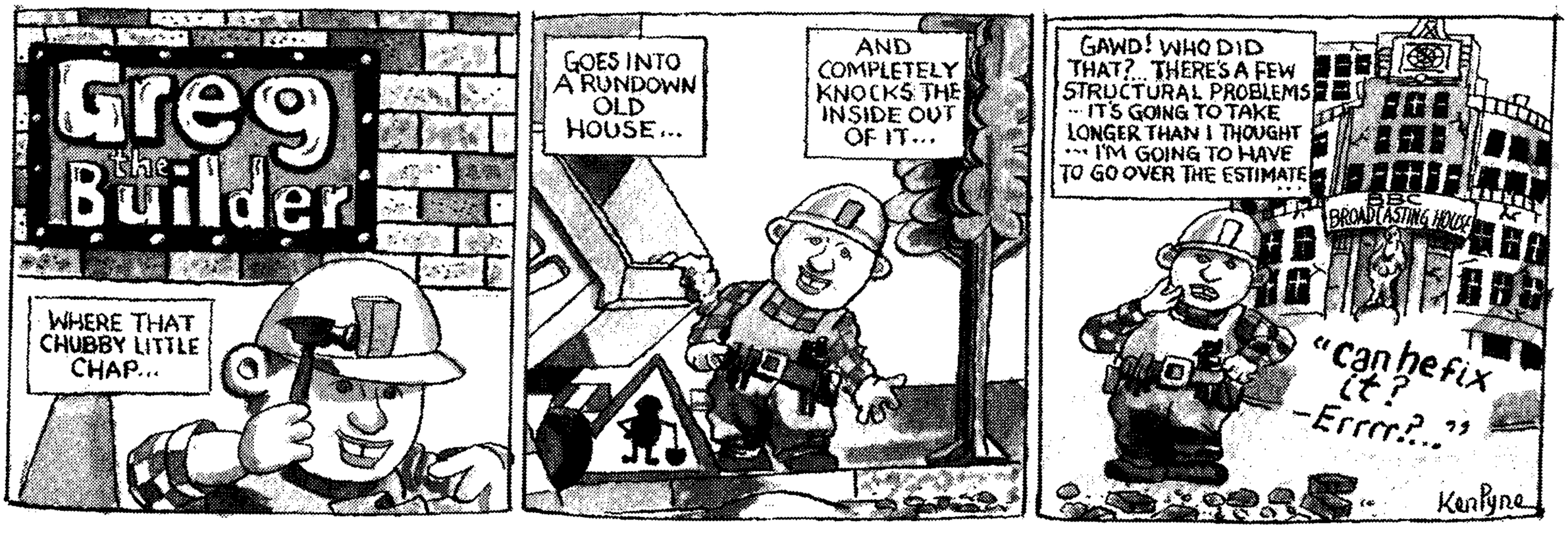
The *Eye* subsequently revealed that part-time impresario Gavin sits on the board of directors of the Ambassadors Theatre Group, which owns the Whitehall Theatre where *Puppetry* played until 6 January. So great is the show's charm, however, that the Beeb's rampant promotion of it did not stop at its own staff. The tasteful programme chosen to bring in the new year on the digital channel, BBC Choice, was... *Tackle Happy: The Puppetry of the Penis*.

THE current head of BBC radio drama, Kate Rowland, has been booted upstairs after three years of dire offerings and widespread disatisfaction from actors, writers and staffers. She's now developing new "talent" across radio and television, enjoying a post that was neither advertised nor boarded.

Meanwhile, a number of talented names inside and outside the BBC are being considered for the radio drama job.

FASHION designer to the stars and progeny of the world's most famous vegetarian family, Stella McCartney made a principled stance at her Paris show in the spring of 1999 when she cold-shouldered Camilla Parker Bowles because of the would-be queen's fox-hunting tendencies.

Odd, then, that McCartney has not applied this same high-mindedness to the queen of pop. Did she forget, when designing Madonna's wedding dress for *that* do at Skibo castle, that her new bosom buddy came under considerable criticism from animal rights protesters herself when she sported real fur in the film version of *Evita*?


Greg the Builder
WHERE THAT CHUBBY LITTLE CHAP...
GOES INTO A RUNDOWN OLD HOUSE...
AND COMPLETELY KNOCKS THE INSIDE OUT OF IT...
GAWD! WHO DID THAT?... THERE'S A FEW STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS ... IT'S GOING TO TAKE LONGER THAN I THOUGHT ... I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GO OVER THE ESTIMATE...
BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE
"can he fix it? -Errr.?..."
KenPyne

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Hugh Grant Bovoy

IN THE fine tradition of arts funding organisations awarding grants to worthy creative causes, the Performing Right Society (set up to collect licence fees for some 34,000 composers, songwriters and music publishers) launched the Performing Right Society Foundation in March 2000 to distribute a £1m fund for the promotion of new music.

The foundation aimed to allocate the entire £1m by the end of 2000, evidently a complicated task since the highest set of cash sums awarded was only announced in December, while the final recipients will be not be made public until early this year. At the end of the lengthy selection process the six trustees finally decided to award £43,000, the largest handout to date by far, to the Roundhouse Trust, a performing arts venue in Camden, north London.

The trustees' decision was obviously not influenced by the fact that one of their number, Marcus Davey, is, er, chief executive of the Roundhouse.

END OF EMPIRE

THE DIRTY DIGGER enters the new millennium in a sour frame of mind. As he approaches his 70th birthday in March, and when he's not excusing himself from conjugal duties with the lovely Wendi Deng, his sleep is troubled by the traditional Chinese wizard's warning that the third generation always squanders the wealth amassed by the first two. Rupert has built extravagantly on the inheritance from his dad, Sir Keith Murdoch; but neither of his own probable heirs, Lachlan or James, seems able to do the business.

Lachie's chances of succeeding his father as head of News Corp have not been improved by his latest spree. Last month he agreed to pay £40m a year for the rights to Australian rules football in the hope that it would save Foxtel, the Digger's Down Under subscription TV service which is currently bleeding £35m a year. No doubt he had in mind how his dad rescued Sky with premier league soccer. But the Foxtel deal hardly seems much of a bargain by international standards. What is Aussie rules football anyway? Nobody outside Melbourne understands it.

Lachlan's only other achievements to date are the doomed SuperLeague rugby competition, the loss-making phone company One-tel and the Fox Studios' "backlot" leisure centre in Sydney – described by one financial journal as "the worst property development in the world".

Lachie's younger brother James has only one claim on the News Corp succession. Thanks to his efforts in Hong Kong, the pisspoor Star TV is now losing marginally less money than when his father bought it. But this is hardly enough to merit putting the lad in charge of the entire organisation. Investors don't care much for dynasties: as the *Australian Financial Review* points out, "nepotism and strong share prices rarely go together".

To avoid the inevitable share slump, the Digger and his advisers are at last seriously thinking of getting a hard-nosed pro to take the helm, hopefully before the old man himself makes any more big cock-ups. (News Corp's failure to float Sky as a global network was a classic Digger dither.) Step forward right-wing Colorado landowner John Malone, chairman of Liberty Media which owns 18 per cent of News Corp – slightly more than the Murdoch siblings.

Malone is a genuine internet tycoon, a former engineer who actually understands all the bits and bytes that so mystify the Digger. As president of the US cable giant Tele-Communications Inc, which merged with AT&T in 1998 and has a deal with Microsoft to put interactive data boxes on every TV in America, Malone is perfectly positioned to manage the US's switch to "digital democracy". Although his News Corp shares don't come with voting rights, he's already in the building shouting and throwing his weight around.

What future would Lachie and James have in the company if Malone takes charge? Bugger all, one suspects. Which leaves the Digger with an agonising dilemma as he prepares to become a septuagenarian: should he loyally protect his boys – or sacrifice them to save the Murdoch empire from pegging out soon after he does?

LAST YEAR Rupert Murdoch made a surprise donation of $10m towards the construction of Our Lady of the Angels, a splendid new Catholic cathedral for Los Angeles. True, he had the cheque drawn on a News Corp account, thus allowing him to write off the money against corporation tax. But it's the thought that counts: conscious of his own mortality, Rupert had clearly decided to adopt a more Christian approach to what remains of his life.

Fat chance. On the evening before their Christmas break, four long-serving nurses who run the first-aid unit at Murdoch's 20th Century Fox studio received two envelopes. The first contained a Christmas card from Rupert and his studio chief Peter Chernin, cancelling the nurses' Christmas bonuses and explaining that a donation would be made to a children's charity instead. (Murdoch omitted to add that he had immediately obtained a tax credit for this "charitable" gesture.) The second contained a redundancy notice, giving the statutory four weeks' notice.

Obviously, despite Rupert's prostate problems, there's life in the malevolent old bastard yet.

CRAFTY OLD PLUGGER!

WAS there a more blatant plug over Christmas for his employer's satellite TV station than that uttered by *Sun* TV critic Garry Bushell?

Commenting on the pisspoor seasonal TV schedule he told *London Tonight* on Wednesday 27 December: "Most people turned over and watched the films on Sky."

Oh yeah?

DUMB BRITAIN

THE WEAKEST LINK: CELEBRITY SPECIAL

AR: In politics, what "W" was a pact signed by the Soviet Union in 1955 as a response to West Germany joining NATO?

Vanessa Feltz: The Williamsburg Treaty.

AR: In clothing, a stovepipe is a type of what?

Alice Beer: Trouser.

AR: In the animal kingdom, what "C" is a large North American reindeer?

Nicholas Parsons: A moose.

AR: In nature, what "C" is the name given to the furry tufts of flowers carried by trees such as willows and hazels in spring?

Sue (of 'Mel & Sue'): Tumbleweed.

Pseuds Corner

Food is the new sex and bread is its lingerie. It's the foreplay for the whole meal.

WENDY LEIGHTON
Observer Magazine

"Relic", a new piece of art which comprises a dead fly taken from the floorboards of John Lennon's childhood bedroom in Liverpool and mounted in a glass case. "It looks like a diamond, very precious," says its creator, Sarah Lovett, citing a price tag of £9,999.99. "This fly is not about money. It's about questioning beliefs and why people need to believe in something, worship something."

Daily Telegraph

Tamara Ingram... has become Chief Executive of Saatchi & Saatchi, one of the world's leading advertising agencies. Tamara married Andrew Millington and has two children, Max (8) and Anya (6).

"When I left university I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was incredibly left-wing and was weighing up whether to go into social work or whether to try to make lashings of money."

Soon after Tamara found herself temping for Saatchi & Saatchi. "I fell in love with it, although I didn't expect to. I got caught up in the magic mix of creativity and business. I do believe you can get anything you want – and if not then you just have to change your dream."

***Ziggurat*, University of Anglia**
Society magazine

The internal rhymes, the mellifluous verse, the vocabulary have more in common with Gerard Manley Hopkins than the rantings of a foul-mouthed yob.

JAMES DALRYMPLE
(on rapper Eminem)
Spectator

It is a symbolic present I like to give to brides I marry. But it's not just one present, there are

actually two of them together – just like the couple [Madonna and Guy Ritchie].

It's long and strong which is what I hope their marriage will be – so it's a twin pack of toilet rolls.

REV. SUSAN BROWN
Sunday Express

This year's Reading University Drama Society's production was *Romeo and Juliet* with a twist. Director Toby Tobbell modernised the original by transforming a war between families into a division between cults. The Capulets were portrayed as a female cult keen on making a lesbianic match for Juliet. For this reason the roles of the Capulets and Paris were taken by women.

Alumni and Friends
(Reading University)

Nigella Lawson's current dedication to pink signals in one easy visual hit her femininity and accessibility.

ALEXANDRA SHULMAN
Daily Telegraph

CONTRIBUTORS: Keith Flett, Stephen O'Laughlin, "Donatella Maisano", Strobes, Janice James, Mike Morris, Valerie Armson.

£10 paid for entries

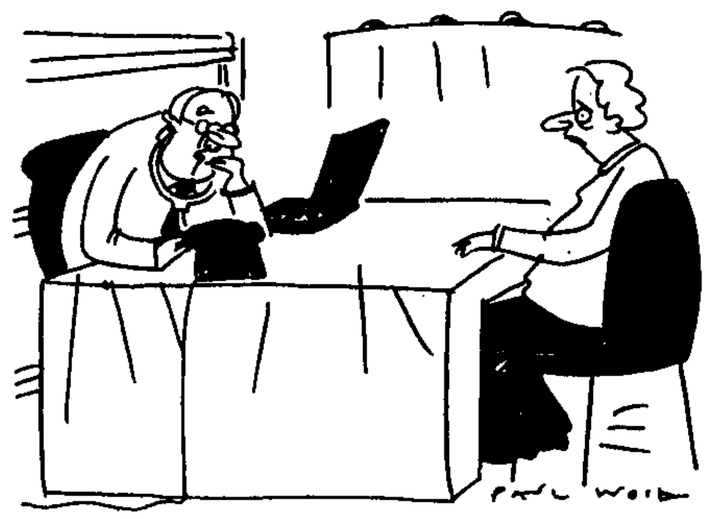
DOING THE ROUNDS

FOLLOWING the damning external review into the Oxford Heart Centre (*Eyes passim*), reader W.F. Cooke has written to the John Radcliffe hospital to demand a refund for the quadruple bypass he was forced to pay for privately.

Mr Cooke forked out £10,000 of his own money for a bypass in 1997 having been told that the NHS waiting list was at least 12 months. Mr Cooke chose to use up half of his retirement lump sum rather than risk dying on the list, and is particularly angry that the lack of effective management in Oxford during that period lead to a fall in the annual number of heart operations from 1,400 to 800 and a 30 percent increase in those waiting at least nine months for urgent surgery.

The report also found that the process of allocation of patients for operations was "chaotic" and that "private patients always appear to be first on the list." Now why's that, then?

A surgical unit has to be in pretty dire straits before the Royal College of Surgeons does anything about it but even it was forced to withdraw training recognition from Oxford, a situation unparalleled in the history of heart surgery (even the Bristol unit managed to sail through its RCS inspections during its times of crisis). However, Oxford surgeon Stephen Westaby has been quick to defend the unit's record in a letter to the *Times*, citing the £1.5m raised privately for trials into an artificial heart, which gives him carte blanche to do pretty much what he likes in the trust.



"Give it to me straight, Mr Wilson, how much can you afford?"

On the subject of surgical training, he gives a more telling insight in a new book, *Succeeding in Hospital Medicine — the experts share their secrets* (Health Press). "I was captain of cricket and rugby and my single-mindedness was recognised with the award of `Student Most Likely to Succeed' in 1972... During my surgical training in Cambridge, I was nicknamed `Jaws' and operated on anything and everything day and night... The heart is unforgiving and should never be the first target organ for a trainee surgeon.

"Britain's lead in cardiac surgery began to dwindle rapidly as private practice took surgeons out of NHS hospitals... In 1986, at the age of 37, I was appointed consultant to the new regional cardiothoracic unit in Oxford. This presented the unique opportunity for a new direction in cardiac surgery as there were no senior colleagues. Within a few years, the number of operations increased from a 150 to 1,800 patients a year..." So where did it all go wrong?

Westaby was quick to point out in the *Times* that his unit has "the lowest death rate in the world for dissected aorta", but ignores the fact that — nearly six years after the Bristol tragedy — Oxford still can't be bothered to submit figures to the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons risk-adjusted national adult database. No such database exists yet for child heart surgery because no one has agreed a process of risk stratification for children that would compensate surgeons doing harder operations. However, one senior heart surgeon has told M.D. that this is no reason for a unit not to publish its figures.

"All the child heart surgery units around the UK treat roughly comparable groups of children. There are no genetic clusters of particular forms of congenital heart disease in the UK that I am aware of and so there really is no excuse not to come clean about your figures. If your unit's mortality is around 3-6 percent then you have nothing to worry about, but if it's up above 10 percent, that centre needs urgent investigation, risk stratification or not. At present, the system is still geared to saving doctors' reputations rather than protecting patients from unnecessary harm."

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on fares

TRANSPORT supremo John Prescott might as well have asked turkeys for a "full report" on Christmas when he demanded a "full report" from the shadow Strategic Rail Authority (sSRA) on the latest fare rises.

Like its Opraf predecessor the sSRA has a policy of distorting the truth about fares, presumably to defend its own actions. After issuing its latest fares propaganda at the end of October, an sSRA spokesman said: "In real terms, nearly all passengers will be paying less. It would be nice if there were no increases at all but if we are to see improvements in services then that needs money."

That second sentence shows the depths the sSRA will plumb to defend fares: the idea of customers paying now for better products in future is nonsense, on the railways or anywhere else. Rail fares go to the train operators, who are charged the same by Railtrack and the rolling stock owners unless and until new infrastructure or trains come into use. Until then the extra income from fares covers inflation, the demand for fatter profits and – most embarrassingly for the sSRA – the continuing fall in subsidy handed out by the sSRA.

The claim that "nearly all passengers will be paying less" is equally barmy. The spokesman may have been thinking of simplistic surveys which routinely find that the average train fare has not increased. Such surveys pay no heed to value for money, ignoring the onerous conditions now attached to many tickets and the limited availability of the cheapest tickets. If a food company shrunk its tins of beans but charged the same as for the larger size, most people would think beans were dearer. The sSRA would see only that the cost of a tin of beans is unchanged.

Calculating value for money must also take account of service quality – worse than ever on many routes lately. The train companies have refused to acknowledge passengers' expectation that price should be linked to quality because worsening quality in most areas implies that fares should drop. But if and when the service does improve, perhaps when new trains come into use, train operators will suddenly realise quality should be reflected in price after all.

Prescott has already shown he favours simplistic rather than realistic analyses of train fares. When confronted with news of fares rising by up to 4.9 percent despite the huge rail disruption, Prescott said: "The regulated fares have had a reduction in prices." He was referring to the limited range of tickets which are capped around inflation but are not genuinely regulated as operators are free to increase restrictions on validity.

The saver ticket is "regulated" but companies like Virgin and First Great Western have outlawed its use on so many trains that many travellers have to pay the standard return fares (officially unregulated). Passengers returning from Euston to Wolverhampton between 4pm and 6.15pm paid £29 for a saver ticket in 1997 but now have to pay £85.50 for a standard return – an increase of 195 percent for users of a "regulated" fare.

The sSRA told one *Eye* reader that today's saver-ticket conditions are based on BR's conditions. When he asked how his Great Western fare had therefore risen from £52 to £98, the sSRA tried to justify its claim by saying BR could have imposed extra restrictions but, er, did not.

The uncomfortable truth about fares will no doubt be ignored in the sSRA's "full report" to Prescott. That will suit them both, because neither has the slightest intention of doing anything to stop British passengers being ripped off mercilessly.

PS: Virgin emerged from the row over the new year fares hike smelling of roses because hacks had forgotten how Virgin had relentlessly upped its fares at every previous opportunity. When Virgin said it would postpone its January fares increase because of its terrible service, it should have been announcing a sweeping fares reduction. Instead it was patted on the back for having increased the standard Rugby to Euston return fare, for example, by a mere 44 percent since 1997.

● IN the light of the near-miss at Victoria Station last week between two Connex South Central trains, has Railtrack's attitude really changed that much since the Ladbroke Grove disaster in autumn 1999?

The answer can perhaps best be judged by the company's reaction when a Thames Trains service passed a red signal at precisely the same location in Paddington last month.

The train was leaving Paddington on the track adjacent to the one used by the Thames train which caused the crash in 1999. The driver over-ran signal SN107 – a few feet to the left of the notorious SN109 on the same gantry over the tracks. This time the train stopped within yards and there were no serious consequences. Railtrack and Thames Trains reacted by arguing whether the signal (Railtrack's responsibility) or driver (Thames' responsibility) were at fault; Railtrack denied Thames' claim that the signal changed to red as the train approached.

Whatever the cause of the incident both Railtrack and Thames may be indirectly to blame: Railtrack for not having acted on complaints that the signals are obscured by a road bridge; and Thames for refusing to fit automatic train protection (ATP) to its trains although the Paddington line is (a) Britain's only mainline with trackside ATP equipment; and (b) has a history of signals being passed at danger with tragic consequences. As long as each can blame the other, the status quo remains.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOWN ON THE FARM

AS Britain's farmers struggle through the deepest crisis in their history – last year alone another 24,000 left the industry in despair – nothing has frustrated them more than the scarcely credible incompetence of their supposed official leaders. Never has the NFU more completely justified its proud title as the "No Effing Use".

Last year so angry were West Country farmers at the tight little self-perpetuating oligarchy running their union that one outspoken Devon dairy farmer, Richard Haddock, made an unheard-of bid, as a mere grassroots member, to stand against sitting president Ben Gill. His revolutionary notion was that the NFU should once again try to represent the interests of farmers. But so carefully designed are the rules to stitch up the election process in favour of the established hierarchy that the NFU's top brass in rural Shaftesbury Avenue had no difficulty contemptuously brushing the challenge aside.

In recent months a new grassroots campaign has been launched to get the rules changed; and the first move was to try to obtain a list of all NFU members in the west so that, in the name of democracy, they could be written a letter explaining what was going on and canvassing support. But when Gerald Vennall, and others approached the union asking for the names and addresses of their fellow members, they were witheringly told that such a thing was out of the question. To supply such a list would be in breach of the data protection act.

To their amazement they then discovered that the NFU had actually sold precisely the list they were asking for to a national mailing company! Apparently it was not a breach of the data protection act to sell the names and addresses of NFU members to a private firm for thousands of pounds so farmers could be deluged with propaganda from chemical companies and junk mail about double-glazing. But to release the list so farmers can get in touch with each other to discuss the crisis in farming would be a criminal offence.

Anthony Gibson, the NFU's south-west regional director, bluntly explained: "We do provide membership information to branch chairmen so they can see which of their local farmers are members and try to recruit those which are not. But we do not make blanket lists of NFU members available." However, in a wondrously cynical flourish he then suggested that "if people want a copy, they can buy one from whichever mailing house we sold the list to".

By the time the farmers have discovered how to get round the bureaucracy they themselves pay for out of their fast-vanishing incomes, perhaps they too will have gone bankrupt like so many of their colleagues. Then who will be left to pay the salaries of officials like Gibson and Gill? This is perhaps the one twist to the story the NFU's cunning apparatchiks haven't yet faced up to.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BEFORE THE FLOOD

ONE of the most irresponsible recent examples of building on ground liable to flooding emerges from the village of Farringdon, near Alton, Hampshire.

Sixteen families had to flee their homes in the week before Christmas as water from an underground stream, polluted with sewage and diesel oil, surged through them to a depth of six feet. The water is still there and the residents remain in temporary accommodation.

The families had moved into Chase Field, a joint development between the Downland Housing Association and East Hampshire district council, in 1993 as tenants and part-owners under a scheme to provide "affordable" homes for locals. Alas, the houses were built directly above a "lavant" stream, an underground waterway which older villagers know floods every few years. Some can remember rowing boats on Chase Field, others recall skating across frozen floodwaters.

Parish councillor Tim Charrington, who has a photograph of swans swimming across Chase Field in 1945, says he and others warned district council officers of the flooding risk at the time of the planning application in 1992 but were ignored. The National Rivers Authority – predecessor of the Environment Agency – recommended that East Hampshire's technical services department take measures to assess the threat and the council's own planners advised that the site "may be liable to flooding", but they played down the risk. Councillors then gave the scheme the go-ahead with predictable results.

NIT-NET

INCOMPETENT housing benefit (HB) contractor Itnet, due to lose its contract with Hackney this year (Eye 1016), is now on shaky ground in neighbouring Islington.

A report by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) into the administration of Islington's annual £120m HB concludes that Itnet provides a "totally inadequate service" and that the council's in-house anti-fraud team is so useless that fraudsters claim HB in Islington safe in the knowledge that even if they are caught they won't have to pay a penny back.

The BFI says Itnet "is not learning from its own mistakes" and that genuine claimants "face hardship as they are unable to meet rent commitments as a direct result of claims not being processed". The report observes that "contracting out has not been a success", and lays much of the blame for this with the council, which is accused of a "failure to manage or enforce the contract".

Investigators found that 88 of the 131 staff employed by Itnet are temps; that staff have ample opportunity to commit fraud due to a lack of effective management; and that the data Itnet gives the council regarding its performance is wholly unreliable.

The BFI identified one scam in which claimants apply for HB from temporary accommodation, such as a hostel which can cost up to £200 per week, and then get their claims put into payment for 60 weeks by Itnet staff. (Claims from secure addresses, such as council tenancies, are normally put into payment for 32 weeks, while claimants in hostels normally have their claims allowed for shorter periods in case they move on without telling the council.) The crooks then move out of the hostel after a week or two and have their post, including HB cheques, redirected to home or agency addresses. The lax in-house anti-fraud team, the BFI found, rarely investigates mail re-directs – leading to Islington becoming a honeypot for fraudsters.

HINDE SIGHT

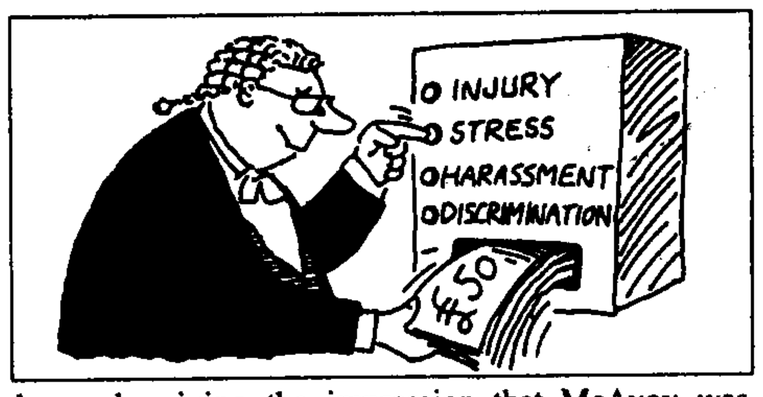
DESPITE the appointment of new broom managing director Max Caller, who last year vowed to "put Hackney's house in order", it is still business as usual in the benighted east London borough.

In the council where paedophile social worker Mark Trotter was allowed to carry on abusing children for years in the 1980s until he died of Aids, a senior officer involved in the care of children and subject of a police investigation has quietly been allowed to resign.

Meanwhile Caller has been sitting for four months on a report by borough solicitor Chris Hinde into allegations of corruption in the Stamford Hill planning committee involving the borough's Tory mayor Joe Lobenstein, first aired in *Eye* 981 in July 1999. The report must be a thorough one. It took Hinde, who coincidentally used to be secretary of the former Dalston city partnership regeneration quango, of which Lobenstein was a director, more than a year to produce.

At least some Hackney officers are quicker off the mark. After NUT members at just one Hackney school, Stoke Newington comprehensive, voted in December not to cross picket lines during a one-day strike by non-teaching unions against proposed budget cuts and redundancies, their general secretary Doug McAvoy wrote to them pointing out that such a vote endorsed unlawful secondary action.

Officers in Hackney's education department then copied McAvoy's letter, with the recipient school's name blanked out, and faxed it to every school in the



borough, giving the impression that McAvoy was coming down on the side of the local education authority in a dispute he in fact wanted to keep out of. That's the kind of enterprise Hackney needs!

BRISTOL FASHION

NEW technology, boasts "new" Labour, will open the workings of local government to wider democratic scrutiny and participation. In Bristol it is certainly doing that. Last month opposition Conservative city councillor Marmaduke Alderson received a letter from the city's transport and planning department seeking his views on the long-standing issue of whether a coach park should be sited on the Downs, an open space in his Stoke Bishop ward. Alderson replied by email that he was against such a development.

Within the hour he received a reply from one Neil Terry, co-ordinator of the traffic management team, evidently intended for one of Terry's colleagues. "Just chuck out a standard: Your comments have been noted and will be reported to blah blah..." it said. "Don't worry, the objection will not carry any weight."

Alderson has since been contacted by other Bristol citizens who have received in error emails intended for internal council consumption. Such as the woman who complained about noise in her neighbourhood and received a reply along the lines of: "Just tell her to f— off." So that's how local government really works!

High Principals

EVER since it gave up beer and moved into luxury hotels, Whitbread has been searching around for prime sites in city centres. Now it has the answer: university campuses. The firm has plans to build no fewer than 100 of its Travel Inn hotels right in the middle of any university campus that happens to be near the middle of a town.

The scheme promises profits beyond the company's wildest dreams and has every prospect of success – especially since it is being launched with the generous help of the taxpayer in the shape of the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC).

An HEFC spokesman confirmed to the *Eye* that his council was shelling out £100,000 of public money for legal and financial services to help the first of the Travel Inn schemes – a £7m hotel at Nottingham Trent University. He said the money was being paid under the "private finance initiative". Asked how the council justified such a mighty public boost to a blatantly commercial scheme for private profit, he said the scheme would "help the university".

Relatively cheap accommodation, he said, would be provided in the hotel for academic courses. He said there was nothing remarkable about public funding for the scheme. A similar sum had been shelled out by the HEFC to help build accommodation at the Royal Northern College of Music, for instance; but he couldn't think of a single other case where a private hotel had been built with the help of council money.

PRINCIPAL Lynda Fairhurst's reign at Shena Simon College in Manchester came to an abrupt end when the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) decided to follow up a highly critical report into the college published last summer with a special investigation by former FEFC chief Dr Terry Melia.

Fairhurst's grand plan for the once popular sixth form college was to scrap A-level provision and pour resources into teaching English for students of other languages instead (see *Eye* 1008). In his conclusions published in November, Dr Melia recommended that this policy should be replaced by, er, an expansion of A-level provision and other courses aimed at 16-18 year olds. Failing that, he suggested a more desperate measure: that Shena Simon should merge with another college in the city.

La Fairhurst did not see fit to stick around to implement either of these changes; and the chairman of the governors Viv Bingham has also stepped down. But one central figure remains in place: the college's senior manager, Tim Benson (see *Eyes passim*). As curriculum director Benson was responsible for maintaining the college records of "Starters, Retention and Achievement" required by the inspectorate. The FEFC report found Shena Simon's records for 1999 to be "unreliable", but still the Great Houdini has escaped unscathed.

La Fairhurst did not depart under the black cloud that might have been expected. In recognition of her sterling work at the college – slashing a third of the courses and making one third of the staff redundant – she has been awarded a £50,000 pay off. In sharp contrast the 33 lecturers who were made redundant will remain on the pay roll until the end of the academic year, but have been denied the 3 percent pay rise awarded to other staff.

STAFF at University College London may not feel like joining celebrations to mark the knighthood bestowed upon their provost and president, Professor Chris Llewellyn Smith, in the new year honours' list.

At a meeting of the university's council on 14 December it was announced that on top of the 3 percent pay rise granted to all staff, the provost would receive an additional 4.36 percent with effect from 1 October 2000, bringing his salary to the grand total of £153,635 – enough to make his less well-paid colleagues quite green with envy.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

LOOK AT THIS AUBERGINE, QUIN, IT'S DEFORMED, STUNTED AND COVERED IN MANURE
AND THESE POTATOES - THEY'RE MONSTROUS AND MISSHAPEN, POSITIVELY MEDIEVAL...
SO LET'S FILL HER UP !!!
ORGANIC FARMERS MARKET

Letters

Hang on a Mo

Sir,

I think you owe Mohamed Fayed an apology. His thoughtful gesture in sending the gift of a teddy bear to jailed Norfolk farmer Tony Martin shows that he really is in touch with the mood of the British public, many of whom feel that summary execution is fully justified in the case of persons attempting to steal other's property whether from their homes, their safety-deposit boxes or even from their solicitor's dustbin.

Yours faithfully,
DAVE HOWE,
Clacton-on-Sea, Essex.

Open Forum

Sir,

Contrary to your report (Eye 1018), the BBC Forum was a running sore to John Birt and his Board of Management. Most of the founder members (of whom I was one) were union-supported and not afraid to speak out against the nonsenses of the internal market and the Broadcast/Production split. We were even threatened with dismissal for sending a letter to 10 Downing Street supporting the candidature of Lord Puttnam for BBC chairman. And we "jobsworths" travelled to Forum meetings by second class rail rather than chauffeur-driven limo!

Cordially,
ANTHONY WILLS,
London NW3.

Barking

Sir,

On p. 22 of your latest issue there is an ad for the "Fidophone" – a mobile phone for dogs for only £35.

You are behind the times! "This is London" in the Evening Standard on 27/10/00 contained a report that the Japanese are developing a mobile phone for both dogs and cats. Under the heading "New dog and bone keeps pets happy", John Sturgis describes how the phones can be activated without the use of buttons.

DARON GUNSON,
Hatfield Peverel, Essex.

Sofa so bad

Sir,

The "sofa-float" available in your Holiday Mail Mart began in poor taste and then transcended all decency when I spotted the legend "New from Bangladesh!"

Can I be the first to cancel my order for 2001, or has another sensitive soul beaten me to it?

Yours in floods of tears (oh shit, now I've done it),
JOHN MAUDLIN,
Via e-mail.

A pedant writes...

Sir,

Re: the cartoon on Father Christmas bowling snowballs at penguins with pine trees in the background (Eye 1018). Was this simply a cheap stunt to rattle pedants into pointing out that penguins live in the rather tree-less environment of Antarctica whilst Father Christmas lives at the other end of the world in the Arctic where quite a few pine trees grow?

After all, Private Eye's staff of arts graduates would never make a mistake like that!

Yours,
DR DUNCAN CAMPBELL,
Via e-mail.

Lookalike

Brenda

Tubbs

Sir,

An informally attired Brenda bears a striking resemblance to Tubbs from BBC2's League of Gentlemen. A local monarch for local people, perhaps?

Yours (with dark and brooding humour),
JACQUELINE PERKS & MARK SMITH,
Buckingham.

Not very Equitable

Sir,

Re: Equitable Life. I enjoyed your column regarding the above but in the stampede to say that we should all be suing Equitable for something that sounds very like fraud, no one ever writes about the advisers who charged the client fees for advising the use of a company whom many regarded for the last number of years as less than honest. Many people did think that all was not as it seemed but I suspect that few of these were solicitors or accountants. They knew better. A with-profits company which only pays commission to its own sales staff and which consistently offers more than it is likely to be able to supply should arouse suspicion. It seems not.

I for one certainly feel that an argument could be made that any client of a professional person who was charged for being given a licence to lose money and consequently retire poor, should have a case against that adviser but I have yet to read anyone else expressing this sentiment.

Yours sincerely,
W.A. McINTOSH (MR),
Edinburgh.

Thank you note

Sir,

My reason for writing is to thank you for covering the rather mealy-mouthed IBM Corporation's raid on my pension fund while the worldwide leader lines his own pockets.

The company assures us this is completely legal. This is really comforting!

Basically, as I am sure your magazine understands, the ploy by the company is to say the pension is a defined benefit scheme and therefore if they guarantee the benefit they can have the rest of the money.

I perceive several problems with this: UK law as I understand it intends the use of the surplus to be defined by the trustee in the interests of all the members – company, employees and retirees; the IBM plan offers "increases" which are in fact undefined. In addition, the members actually contribute to the plan.

I note that Mr Myers seems to understand that companies are in a good position to "nobble" the trustees and that the UK law (like a lot of its company law) is pretty open to abuse. I guess we will see what he says in January; perhaps this might move the legal profession on a step or two.

Yours,
JAMES E. WILSON,
Carshalton, Surrey.

Shopping Oxfam

Sir

Re: "Charity" (page 11, 29 December). Your criticism of professionalism at Oxfam is frankly very odd. I make absolutely no apology for Oxfam being professional. I'm sure that the people we help and our supporters wouldn't either.

I'm afraid you've also got your figures wrong. Oxfam shops made £8.8m profit in 1999-2000 — not the £7.6m you state. £8.8m is the highest profit of all charity retailers, and it would fund all of Oxfam's work in Latin America for a year.

Ask any high street shop — times are tough. Our profits may be down from the previous year, but the reason they haven't crashed is because of the great job being done by a combination of paid shop managers and volunteers. And the reason Oxfam shops haven't been driven off the high street is that they are professional.

David Bryer,
Director,
Oxfam GB.

Sir,

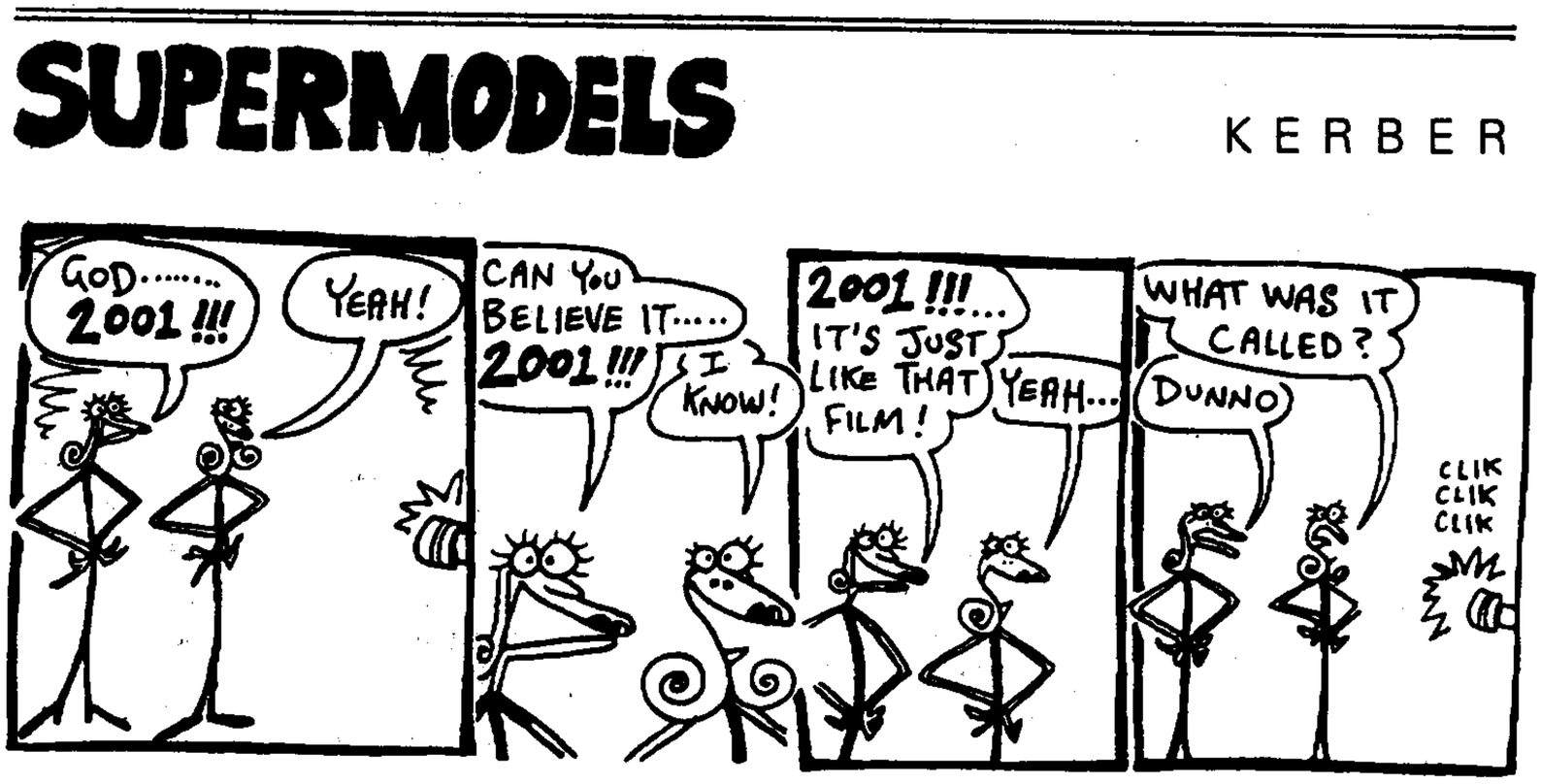
Oxfam (Eye 1018) is criticised for jumping on the bandwagon of management culture in professionalising its "famous high street shops by bringing in paid managers to run outlets which had previously relied on volunteers".

However, the argument, which you maintain, that charity work be an unpaid endeavour is both idealistic, in failing to meet mortgage payments, and unacceptable, in permitting only those with their own agendas and means to ensure charitable contributions continue to be made.

Each of Oxfam's 800-plus shop managers works in excess of 40 hours per week whilst, together, they are responsible for the well being of over 20,000 volunteers, on whom Oxfam continues to rely, and sales in excess of £1m per week. Unfortunately, over a quarter of Oxfam's shop managers are and will remain unpaid full time or part time volunteers because of the low volume of turnover of their shops.

Whilst Oxfam is "management heavy", this is because of a large, unproductive middle management structure and the excessive use of outside consultants in its Trading Division. Oxfam will solve its problem by both a substantial reduction in numbers of middle management and consultants and the passing of greater autonomy to its "professional" shop managers with the promise of performance related enhancement to their current meagre salaries.

Yours faithfully,
FRED RODGERS,
London W1.



I-SPY

Singapore supermarket

Submitted by Peter J. Russell. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

In video veritas

Sir,

The story in Street of Shame (Eye 1018) about Richard Desmond's Television X coverage of the 1997 general election was so detailed that whoever wrote it must either have a photographic memory of events that occurred three-and-a-half years ago or kept a video of the proceedings for, er, posterity. Wonder which?

JON MASSEY,

Plymouth.

LUVVIES

"Doing *Godot* was open heart primal therapy, night after night," he says. "Like opening up your rib cage right there in front of everyone. But yes, I missed the character afterwards. He had become a twin brother. I had to take care of him all that time."

BEN KINGSLEY
The Times

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

No smoke without ire

Sir,

It may seem obvious that banning tobacco advertising would reduce tobacco consumption (Ad Nauseam, Eye 1018). However such a ban would also remove the anti-smoking health warnings which occupy 15 percent of all such advertising. If the advertising component, which is designed to switch smokers from one brand to another, has little effect on tobacco consumption, but the health warning has the effect it is designed to have, banning "tobacco advertising" might actually increase consumption.

A few years ago I analysed tobacco consumption in the 22 countries of the OECD over the period 1964 to 1990, in order to estimate the effect of tobacco advertising bans in the six countries which had introduced such ban. The best estimate of the effect of total advertising bans was of an increase of about 4 percent. The probability of the effect being a decrease in tobacco consumption was only 1 in 40. The full report is at www.mikestrt.dircon.co.uk

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL STEWART,

London SW1.

"I got given the bumps"

Hair today...

Sir,

For God's sake not another picture of Beardie Branson on the front cover of the Eye. Hopefully in the new year he will shave it off and the Eye can find some other unpleasant capitalist to denounce instead.

Regards,
KEITH FLETT,

London N17.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I used to dream of being a pop star, but I never dreamed I'd be one."
NEIL MORRISSEY, SMTV
(Daniel Stanton)

"Six and a half million people have visited the Dome and six and half left happy or happier."
P-Y GERBEAU, Radio 4
(Andy Lee)

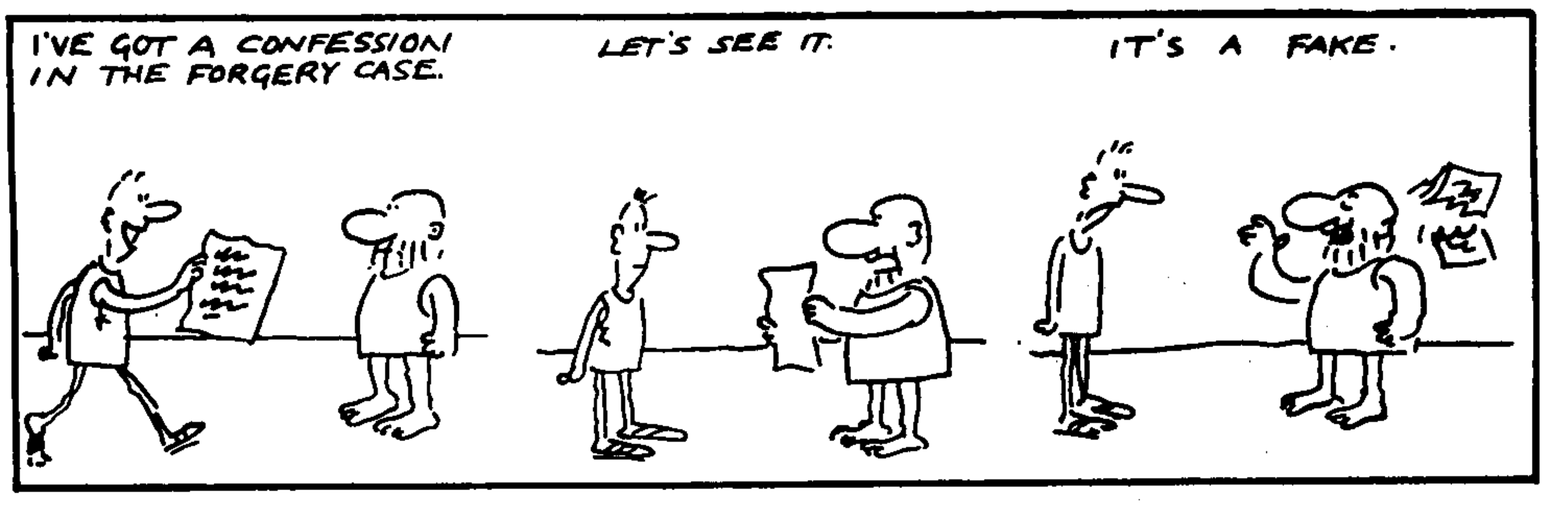
"...allegations of throwing at the women's world cup cricket in Christchurch. One of the Kiwi girls [sic] has been fingered by officials. More after the break..."
SPORTS PRESENTER, New Zealand
(Dave Smith)

"And so he walks away with £250,000. That's the way to win a million on this show."
CHRIS TARRANT, ITV
(Baz Druker)

"Chelsea last won away on April Fools' Day – now it's Boxing Day, another great religious holiday."
DOMINIC JOHNSON, Capital Gold
(Dermot Hunt)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **South Africa**
from *Our Own Correspondent*

IN SOUTH AFRICA, said to be the most religious country in the world, the year of Our Lord 2000 proved a somewhat bumpy ride for divinities of all shapes and colours. Most notoriously our God-fearing cricket captain Hansie Cronje fell spectacularly from grace for accepting bribes from bookies. Hansie blamed this on the devil, but then went one worse and sold his soul to Max Clifford.

Our greatest Sydney Olympic gold medal hope, the former Olympic breaststroke champion Penny Heynes, took only bronze. Afterwards, curiously, she told how in mid-race she heard a voice, telling her to come third "for Jesus." God even got into our recent nationwide municipal elections, with the African Christian Democratic Party running a high-profile campaign that Our Lord wanted South Africa to bring back the death penalty – rather forgetting that under apartheid we had the highest execution rate in the world; on an industrial scale, in fact.

Everyone in national life has been selling their soul, if not to the devil then to the highest bidder. Tony "Baked Beans" O'Reilly, our very own Rupert Murdoch (an absentee newspaper monopolist) sold his to the government. In October, after President Thabo Mbeki once again disastrously questioned the HIV/Aids link, O'Reilly gave the ruling ANC free advertising in all his newspapers to try to spin themselves out of this latest international gaffe – without telling his editors. In other words, he donated ads, gratis, to a government to counteract what his own journalists were – correctly – telling the public.

Two weeks later the government responded with military-style raids on newspapers and TV stations, attempting to seize press pictures of a riot to back up a court case it couldn't prove itself. The raid was also impeccably timed: World Press Freedom Day.

But then the ANC – only yesterday a fire-breathing liberation movement – has speedily sold itself to big business. Here, too, privatisation is the fad. Rather wittily, President Mbeki made the deputy chair of our South African Communist Party, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, minister responsible for neutering public sector unions (she promptly rejected their wage demands by quoting Lenin, to be hailed in the Afrikaans press as "Thatcher-Moleketi"), and appointed another member of the SACP Central Committee, Jeff Radebe, as minister for public enterprises (ie privatisation).

The finest example so far is the deal with creepy British company Biwater, a 30-year water and waste contract in Nelspruit, capital of Mpumalanga province. This betrayed promises that the ANC would consult its union allies, the Congress of South African Trades Unions, and has led to a flurry of allegations that Biwater is making a complete hash of the job. Meanwhile, in neighbouring KwaZulu Natal, cholera rages (a water-borne epidemic, causing more than 50 deaths so far), and the ANC has promised free water to the poor. Biwater or poor blacks? Hm... guess which promise will be broken.

But then COSATU, like the SACP part of a long-established but increasingly uneasy tripartite alliance with the ANC, has also partially hawked its soul to Mammon. With the advent of globalised "free markets", many unions decided to set up investment companies. At least half a dozen leading unionists are now millionaires, in the curious position of investing in companies anxious to deunionize, deregulate, and even demonise, er, trades unions.

It will come as no surprise that the Communists have also merrily flogged their moth-eaten souls to Mr Mephistopheles. The drollest event of the Year of Our Lord 2000? The SACP central committee choosing to expel its leading intellectual, one Dale T. McKinley. His sin? Writing a series of articles attacking capitalism.

Most spectacularly the opposition Democratic Party (with a proud history of resistance to apartheid) threw itself brazenly into the arms of Beelzebub: aka the "New" National Party (the party of racial bigotry, torture, state-sponsored massacres, etc.) The resultant new spawn of the devil, the Democratic Alliance, is basically a Thatcherite-on-steroids white grouping – though the party was caught out giving its leader Tony Leon a darker tint on election posters in the Western Cape, trying to attract the "Coloured" vote.

As we crawl into the Year of Our Lord 2001, it must be confessed: here, at least, Old Nick clearly maintains the upper hand – with skin pigment still his preferred poison.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"It hurt. Believe me, it hurt a lot," Ray Burgard explained to reporters from his home in Springfield, Colorado, "and a friend of mine who's a nurse said I could have damaged myself permanently. But impotence was ruining my life, and I had a wild idea that this might help. And believe it or not, it sure did."

Forty-two-year-old Burgard then explained why he had attempted his radical cure. "I'd always been pretty successful with the ladies, and for eleven years I had a beautiful wife. But when I lost my manly abilities, everything went down the drain. My wife left me in 1992, and I couldn't keep a steady relationship going with anyone. I'd tried everything, but nothing worked, and in the end I thought 'what the hell' because I didn't have anything to lose. I'd read that an electric charge can bring a dead person back to life, and I hoped it might work for the part of me that had gone dead. I tried things out with a small battery first, but that did no good. So I borrowed an electronic stun gun, telephoned an ambulance in case anything went wrong, then pointed the gun at my groin and pulled the trigger.

"I believe that I scored a direct hit, but to tell the truth the next thing I remember was waking up and seeing the ambulance attendants standing over me. The pain was tremendous and I thought for sure I'd done the wrong thing. But the next day I got my wish, when I had my first erection since 1991. I couldn't believe it. It was the happiest day of my life, and I haven't looked back since. I know I took a big risk, but it really worked for me. My wife still won't come back to me though." *(People and Places [Ghana] 17-23 August 2000. Spotter: Nigel Baker)*

—o—

"I have known of this disturbing matter for several months," Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai told the Thai parliament in Bangkok, "but I still do not understand how such a disgraceful thing could have happened. I am still in disbelief, but I have to inform the house that, earlier this year, our Ambassador to The Hague appears to have sold Thailand's embassy to a Dutch businessman."

Later, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry tried to play down concerns. "We have spoken to former Ambassador Prachya Davi Tavedikul, who says that he was tricked into signing a contract that sold the embassy to a businessman for the sum of 3.1 million guilders. The contract was written in Dutch, a language which the Ambassador does not understand, and he thought he was simply authorising repairs. When he discovered what he had done, he was too embarrassed to tell anyone, and instead took early retirement. But the businessman has now started legal action in Holland to enforce the contract, so we will have to look into the matter and see what can be done. The whole matter is infamous." (The Australian, 30/11/2000. Spotter: Charles Stokes)

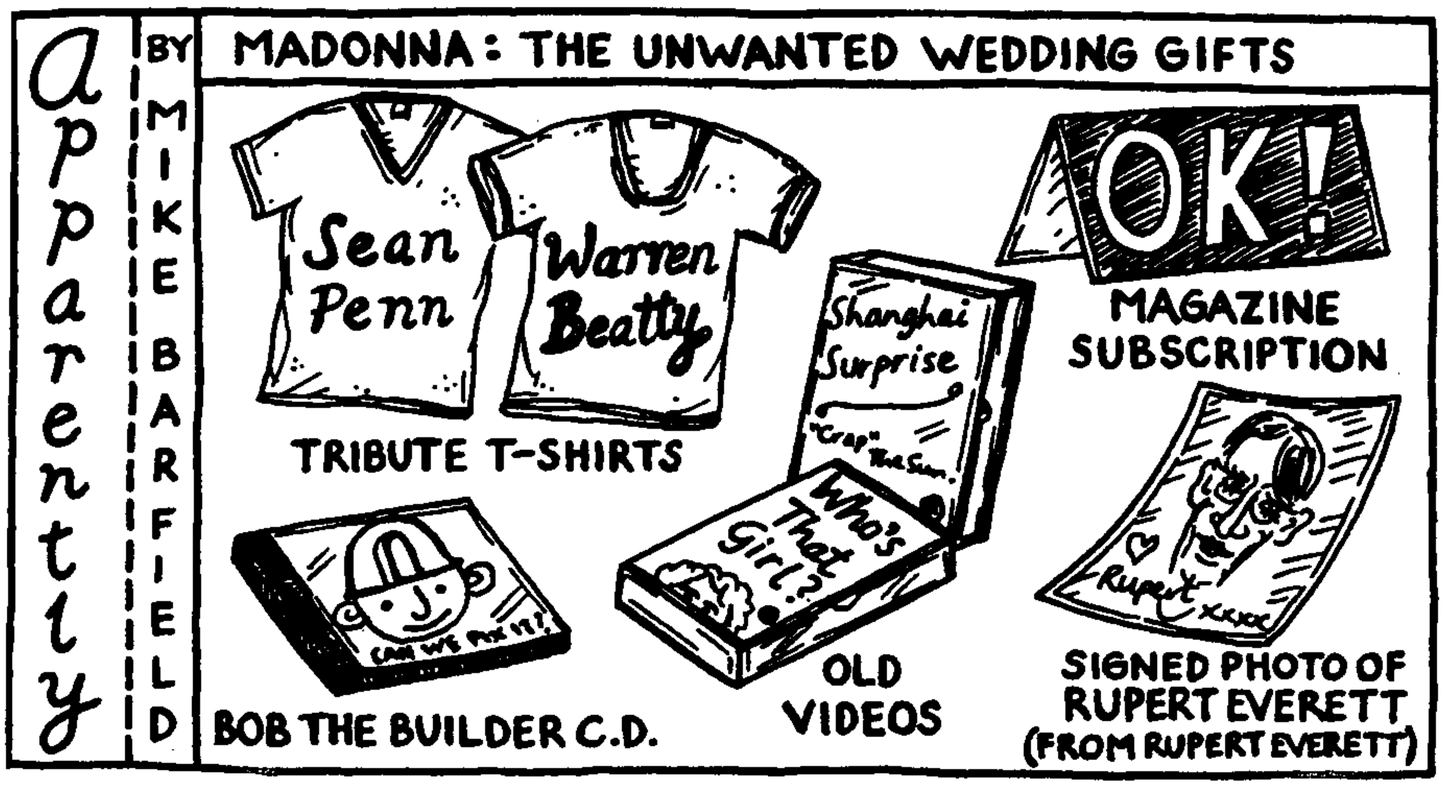
—o—

"We had already reprimanded Edward Baker for entering a restricted area and standing next to the telecommunications feedhorn," Tanya Cooke of the Alaska Signal Relay station told reporters, "but it was impossible for us to enforce the ban, because he was often alone there at night. He used to boast to fellow workers that he liked to stand in front of the microwave dish during his twelve-hour shifts, because it was the only place in the station where he could keep warm in winter.

"It seems that he entered the restricted telecommunications area on Christmas night, carrying a twelve-pack of beer and a plastic

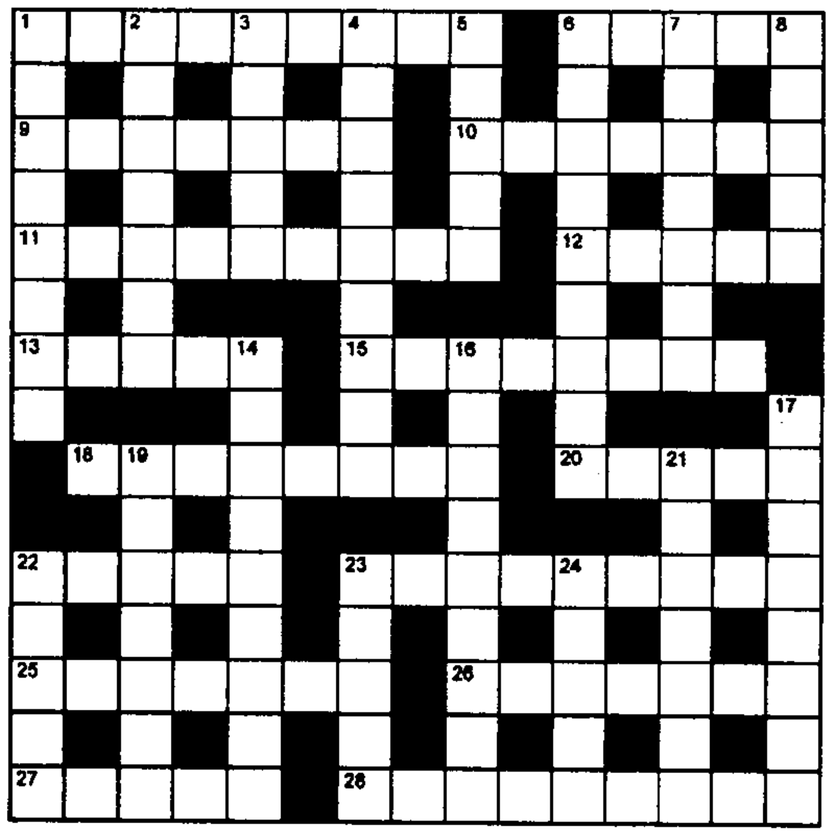
lawn chair, and positioned himself directly in line with the microwave beam. Microwaves can heat water molecules within human tissue in the same way that they heat food in microwave ovens, but usually the intensity of the beam was too low to be dangerous. However, because we'd anticipated an increase in long-distance calling traffic over the Christmas holiday, we'd boosted the microwave signal tenfold. Presumably, Ed didn't realise this.

"When the daytime watchman came on duty next morning, he smelt roast meat, and thought that Ed must have prepared a surprise Christmas roast. Ed's body was charred when he found it, and there was smoke coming from it. Apparently, Ed was hot enough to melt the plastic chair he was sitting in, and all his unopened beers had exploded." *(PIE magazine, December 2000. Spotter: Mrs Ann Cornell)*



EYE CROSSWORD 174

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1/9 Wasting your time and risking a wee reversal (7,2,3,4)
6 Tabloid American turned round is dearest (5)
9 see 1 ac.
10 Eligible to vote, having had much recent success (2,1,4)
11 Knocked down hooker's charge – about time (9)
12 The origins of buggery unfortunately, yet ever regrettably, lead to a procurer (5)
13 In bad taste, a bad loser coming out with "Garbage!"? (5)
15 Henry, a poet – one whose appeal went down badly (8)
18 Sweet things want testicles not starting to rot horribly before start of sex ... (3-5)
20 ... some swear by one that's firm without looking inflamed (5)
22 One who's late having an erection (5)
23 Grope a butt and think you look absurd (4,1,4)
25 Embraced by patriot in gratitude – revolting! (7)
26 Having had an uplift, single female has one grabbed by hacks (7)
27 Obscure adjacent characters in Slough (5)
28 Long drawn-out piss as a result of emptying one? (4,2,3)

DOWN

1 Devious scheme to accommodate long-suffering type (3-2,3)
2 Eye's unavailable – so marches out of the premises (4,3)
3 Half-wit ex-dictator brought to book (5)
4 Possibly bitch about pop 'gangsta' leader (9)
5 The ultimate in neckwear for a swinger (5)
6 Inept corporate stink at the heart of Michael's pointless floundering (9)
7 Ex-president: "Poor Gore? No way – I'm delighted, excited, OK?" (7)
8 Brenda's straight strip (5)
14 The ultimate extra-marital affair? Hold on, Chuck! (4,5)
16 An old soldier 'Emu' reeks badly around trouser opening (9)
17 Being brazen, that is, about chad ultimately secures George as the president (8)
19 Temporarily unemployed, shagged and feeling unwell (4,3)
21 Sexy material Brenda has to return to gallery (7)
22 Cancel Bush! (5)
23 Oldie magazine endlessly dominated by state of confusion (5)
24 Is Cyclops mounting work mate? (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 19.1.01. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.

Solution to Crossword No. 173

£250 winner: JIM SHANK

ACROSS: 1 I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas 15 Tuber 16 Numbers 17 Gusto 18 Sod's law 19 Unimpeached 20 Retainers 21 Utter 22 Hard up 24 Imbecile 25 Live-in lover 29 Bloody-mindedness 31 In bad taste 34 Grant 36 Smarty-pants 38 Beer belly 40 In the red 41 Hare-brained 43 Isaiah 47 Groper 49 Now and again 50 Monarchy 54 Breakneck 55 Imperialist 57 Drama 58 Stand trial 60 Cross-examination 64 Minneapolis 66 Starkers 68 Stuart 71 Fawns 72 In the wash 74 Elephantine 76 Tsunami 77 Petal 78 Toffees 79 Oriel 80 As the actress said to the bishop.

DOWN: 1 In touch 2 Dubai 3 Ezra Pound 4 Maniac 5 Nymphomaniac 6 Overdue 7 Assertion 8 High treason 9 Testicle 10 Clone 11 Resuscitated 12 Sad 13 Molotov 14 Sewer 21 Unlit 23 Riot act 26 Venables 27 Reedy 28 Smasher 29 Bugging 30 Euthanasia 32 Solti 33 Assimilate 35 The beak 37 Pseud 39 Bastard 42 Roger 44 Hay Wain 45 Cocktail 46 Footsie 48 Omega 51 Czarina 52 Necrophiliac 53 Disagreement 54 Bosom 56 Perishables 59 Deep space 61 Spaghetti 62 Antonioni 63 Asbestos 65 New suit 67 Keep fit 69 The clap 70 Chaste 71 Fatwa 73 Toper 75 Irish.

DYKE SAYS BBC 'HIDEOUSLY BAD'

by Our Media Staff **Michael White**

IN A SHOCK interview last night the director-general of the BBC, Mr Greg Dyke, admitted that the BBC was "institutionally rotten".

He told journalists: "I am shocked to find that every time I turn on the TV I see the face of someone who is no good."

He continued: "98% of our staff are hideously bad — including myself. We really need to recruit people from the ranks of the talented minorities."

But an equal opportunities spokesman immediately hit back at Dyke.

"You cannot discriminate against the hopeless and those with no ability. Mr Dyke will find himself being sued under Human Rights legislation."

Peter Sissons is 73.

Deirdre Spart, Co-Chair of the Islington Women Lawyers Against Men Collective

Er, typically the tributes in the male-dominated media to George Carman (ie, not Car-*woman*) have totally ignored Carman's total misogyny and his inexcusable verbal assaults on innocent women seeking legal redress such as Sonia Sutcliffe, er... not to mention Ms Janie Allegover, the distinguished South African feminist journalist, and Mrs Christine Hamilton, the well-known champion of women's rights... er, no wonder that millions of rape victims are reluctant to sue for libel when fascists like George Carman are waiting to... *(cont. p. 94)*

COURT CIRCULAR

HIGHGROVE, MONDAY

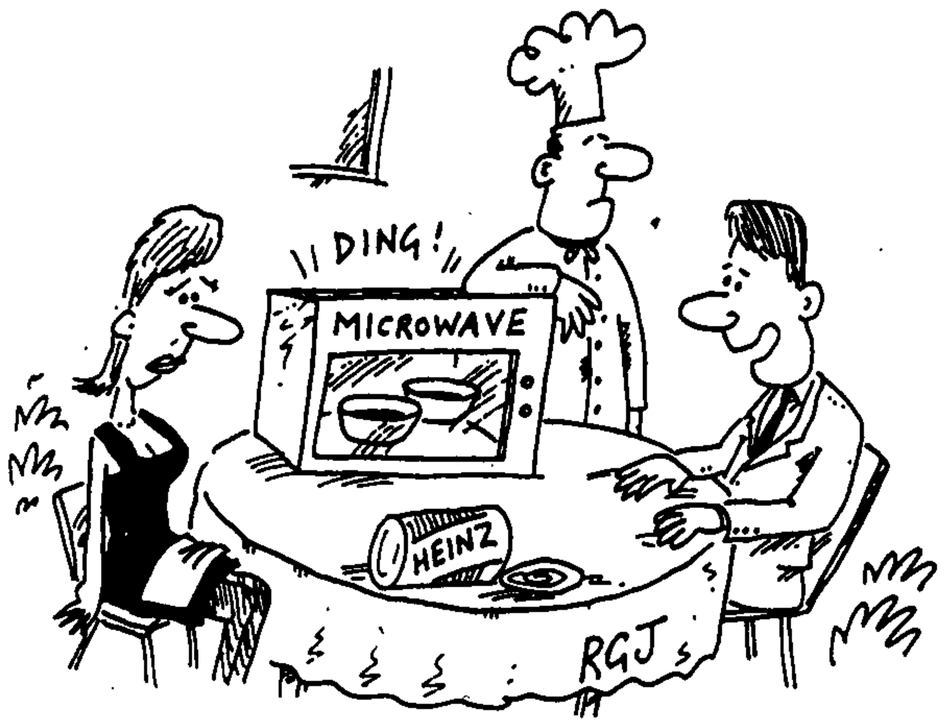
His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will today fall off a horse. His condition will be stated to be "comfortable" after rumours that he has broken his neck prove to be untrue. He will be attended by the Mistress Royal, Mrs Camilla Parker-Biro, who will bring him newspapers in bed bearing the headlines "Ha! Ha! Ha! Serves you right, sire!".

PHUKET (THAILAND), TUESDAY

The Prince Andrew will continue with his royal duties of appearing on the front page of the tabloids. He will be attended by a number of topless lovelies, including Miss Brittany Ferry, Miss Titzi Glitzi, Miss Roberta Maxwell and the Lady Victoria Starborgling (Country Life's Miss September 1998).

SANDRINGHAM, WEDNESDAY

The Princess Royal will attend the services of Matins, after which she will distribute the traditional New Year offensive remarks to members of the public. Mr and Mrs Sidney and Doris Saddoe will receive a "Get stuffed, you pathetic creeps. Get a life." Princess Anne will later apologise and claim to have been misquoted, her original words being "How kind of you to offer the Queen Mother such a delightful floral tribute. I shall give it to her personally. Now fuck off."



"I love these places where they cook the food right in front of you"

2001 THE FACES TO WATCH

Who are they, the young movers and shakers whose faces are going to dominate Britain in the next year? From left to right:

■ **Jenny Jaycloth**, 22, avant-garde artist tipped to win the Turner Prize with her 24-hour video of paint drying.

■ **Nick Nerdie**, 23, dotcom wizard who launches his e-business web crawler "Flop" later this year. Already owes £47 million to the bank.

■ **Euan McEwan**, 23, star of BBC2's forthcoming adaptation of Gerry Adams' memoirs "Bomb of Honour".

■ **Rory Screamer**, [illegible], rising fashion designer who has just opened his own warehouse in up-and-coming Elephant and Castle. His Tweed and PVC 3-piece suits (with see-through crotch) are already being worn by about-towners such as Jonathan Ross and TV's Charles Moore.

■ **Fu Wotascorcha**, 19, Taiwanese-born clarinet prodigy who thrilled audiences at the Edinburgh Festival with her topless rendition of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in B.

■ **Mike Fishwick**, 43, exciting new novelist *(That's enough Faces To Watch. Ed.)*

DR DEATH INNOCENT CLAIMS HISTORIAN

by Our Revisionist Staff
Adolf Shipman

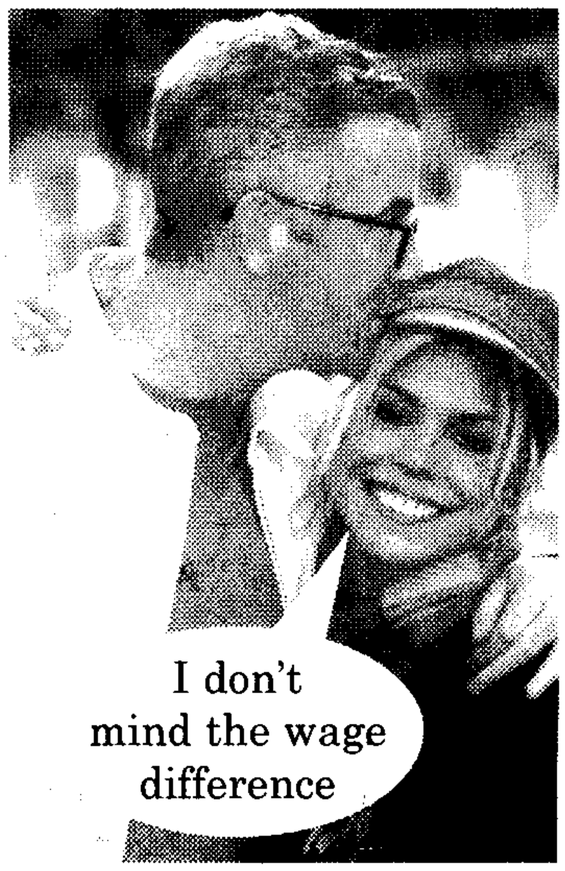
CONTROVERSIAL historian David Irving has written a new book claiming that the figure of 356 murder victims attributed to the Manchester GP Dr Harold Shipman is "a myth".

He says, "There is no evidence linking Dr Shipman to any of the murders... if indeed they are murders. It is perfectly possible that his elderly patients were all victims of a flu epidemic that lasted for 25 years."

David Irving is mad.

Crook joins Barclaycard UK *Financial Times*

SILLIE BILLIE



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And a very happy New Year to you all!

I write these words on what used to be called The Feast of the Epiphany, when we traditionally remember the story of the three rich men who came bearing gifts.

And it's particularly timely that we should think about that old story today. Because here we are, 2000 years later, and some people still haven't got the message – which is that rich men have a very important part to play in the project.

When those three very wise rich men turned up to present their gifts, were they pursued by hordes of reporters from the tabloids?

Were there hysterical headlines in the Bethlehem Star demanding to know the identity of these mystery donors?

Did people say "What's in it for Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar?"

No, they did not! The rich men of those days were rightfully honoured and respected for their contributions!

How sad it is then that in our own times, when members of our own parish community, like Mr Hamlyn or Mr Ondaajte or Mr Sainsbury, are generous enough to put £2 million into the collection plate, everyone at once mocks and sneers and questions their motives.

Isn't it possible, one has to ask, that some people might think so highly of everything I am trying to do for the parish that they might be prepared to express their appreciation in monetary terms?

And this is not the first time we have had to put up with this kind of carping and sniping, when some generous parishioners have been good enough to dig deep into their pockets for the good of the parish!

I am sure you will all remember the fuss about Mr Ecclestone and the adverts for his tobacconist's shop in the parish magazine.

And again, when Mr and Mr Hinduja so generously agreed to become sponsors of our hugely successful Millennium Tent

(now closed), all some people could do was to go on about a supposedly free sari that they had given Cherie.

Honestly, you'd think we'd have developed a slightly more modern attitude to money by now. As it says in the New Labour Testament, "Money is the root of all goodness" *(St Paul Hamlyn's Letter To The Guardian, Ch. 8 v. £2 million).*

Is it too far-fetched to imagine that in 2000 years we will no longer be singing carols about Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar but about the three wise men of our own time, Hamlyn, Ondaatje and Sainsbury!

There's something to think about in the New Year!

Yours, Tony

Mrs Cherie Booth writes:

On reading the above letter, I would like to make clear that my human rights have been seriously breached by the unfounded allegation that I accepted a free gift of a sari from a Mr Hinduja. It is true that such a garment was offered to me by the gentleman in question, but I only wore it once at a parish Multi-Faith Wine and Cheese. Immediately after that I presented it to our local Oxfam Shop. Any further repetition of this unwarranted and gravely damaging allegation will immediately become the subject of legal proceedings.

Lairg and Booth,
The High Street
('Human Writs R Us')
E-mail: www.quidsin.con

Parish In-Box

Dear Sir,

I was frankly appalled by the Vicar's Christmas card, which you reproduced in your last issue, showing the Vicar as the Madonna. I am usually open-minded on such matters, but this was disgus

Yours

(Name and address withheld)

(The editor reserves the right to censor all letters for reasons of space. A.C.)

New To The Parish

A big welcome to our new parishioner Mr Desmond, who has recently bought our local newsagents, now called "Dirty Des".

When we invited him to the vicarage for a mince pie, we were charmed! Some people might have been shocked by some of Mr Desmond's more colourful language, and by his offer to take pictures of Cherie in the nude for his new magazine Vicars' Wives! But I think we have to move with the times and, as a vicar, my job is to mix with people from every walk of life, and not be judgemental about it!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr Prescott is delighted to announce that he has agreed to allow a new dual carriageway to be built through the fields behind the vicarage. There have been complaints from parishioners that Mr Prescott promised that he would stop this road but John has promised that we will hear no more about this. "There'll be too much noise from the bloody road," he says.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to our own Mr Mandelson who was given a lovely party by Mr Bourne, one of the selfless rich men that I have been talking about so much recently.

Mr Bourne gave Peter a super time and, talking of giving generously, I have decided to give the Millennium Tent to Mr Bourne for almost nothing!

You see – it's catching, this "giving" business! T.B.

Millennium Tent Latest

Oui, c'est moi, P-Y Gerbil!

Je suis still here, despite tous les efforts du vicar et son "cronies", comme M. Falconer, de flogger-off le tente à un autre ami, M. Bourne. Quelle scandale énorme, n'est-ce pas? M. Bourne est un ami de M. Mandelson (assez dit!) et il seulement wishes d'acheter le tente pour building hundreds de petits maisons pour les executives behind le vicarage.

C'est un disgrace. Tout le monde knows que le tente est un grand succes, thanks à moi et mon team, et should continuer pour un 1000 years sous le direction de votre reliable ami, P-Y G. (One Amazing Gerbil!).

Note from The Editor: Mr Gerbil has been under a lot of strain recently trying to run a hopelessly misconceived project which he has made even worse by his ineptitude. We naturally wish him well in his early retirement. A.C.

ST ALBION'S SCHOOL

Mr Blunkett, the Chairman of the Governors, would like to assure parents that there are no shortages of teachers in the school this term. There are plenty of teachers to cope with a full curriculum as normal. Term will begin slightly later than usual on Feb 22nd, with half-term commencing on Feb 23rd. More revised dates will be announced in due course.

"Wasting your time, luv. Contract killers were round last week!"

POLLY FILLER

AT this time of year. returning from a weekend visiting friends in Hampshire, Simon and I always have the same argument – should we abandon London and move out to the country?

Do we really want to bring up our toddler Charlie in an urban environment of drugs, crime and pollution?

Why not give him the space to run through green fields, breathe clean air and go to schools where they put on a proper nativity play?

However attractive this rural idyll may sound, Simon and I always remind ourselves of the example of our friends Penny and Giles, who moved out from Notting Hill to Stornoway in the Hebrides, only to find that the nearest cappuccino was a 3,000 mile helicopter ride away!

Even worse, at their remote farmhouse they couldn't get the Sky Violent Sport Channel with Pro-celebrity Truck Wrestling from Santiago.

Back in London, Giles had been in advertising and Penny had worked as a feng shui consultant. Neither found the locals receptive to their plans to convert their croft into a cyber cafe.

Nor were the couple prepared for the lack of affordable public transport. Giles's season ticket to Liverpool Street cost an amazing £420,000 a year and when Penny fancied a trip to Harvey Nichols she was expected to fork out over £23,000 for the day return.

Schooling turned out to be a nightmare, as Ophelia and Antoninus were teased at the local school for not speaking Gaelic.

And their trusty au pair left them because there were no other Turkish girls in the community (population 12) with whom she could go night-clubbing.

Within a week they had returned to London, although they could no longer afford Notting Hill prices, having got off the property ladder and found that their house had tripled in value whilst they were away.

They had also both become alcoholics, driven to drink by the loneliness of bucolic life. They are currently getting divorced, so if it's all the same to you I think Simon and I will stay in smoggy, dangerous, drug-crazed old London for the time being, thank you very much. Well, at least for another year!

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POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Mr George Carman, Mr Victor Borge, Sir James "Jimmy" Shand, Mr H.F. Ellis and Mr Allan Smethurst, the "Singing Postman"

So. Farewell then
All of the above.
(I hope I haven't
Missed anybody.)

It is a busy time
Of year
For us
Obituarists.

E.J. Thribb (aged 17½)

A video of E.J. Thribb performing verses live at the Ilkley Literary Festival 1999 (jointly sponsored by Yorkshire Water and the Equitable Life Insurance Co.) is now available direct from the author at 481C (basement flat) Damart Road, London SE94.

To The Editor Of Any Newspaper Who Is Desperate To Fill Up Space At New Year

Dear Sir,

I enclose my customary list of the most popular names for boys and girls in the past year.

BOYS	GIRLS
Harry	Nigella
Potter	Mariella
Becks	Posh
Wassup	Britney
Gerbil	Billie
Rocco	Nokia
Leo	Cherie
Railtrack	Madonna
Endeavour	Mo
Bob the Builder	Ann Widdecombe

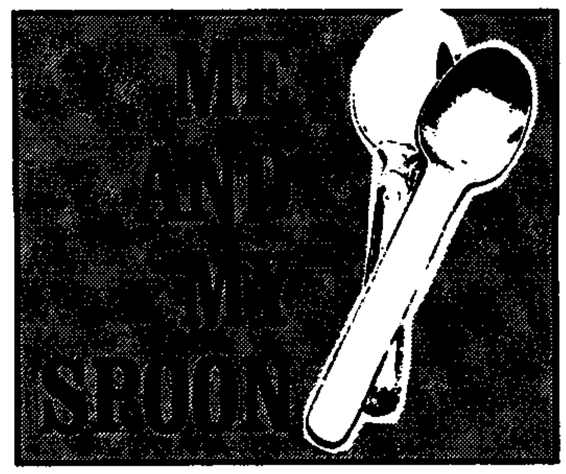
Yours faithfully,

The Rev. Hewlett Packard,
The Old Photocopier,
Xerox, Hants.

10 (9) **How To Eat**
Nigella Lawson
(Chatto, £15) 4,969

The Times

*"Homo sapiens neanderthalensis... you **are** the missing link... Goodbye"*



THIS WEEK

LORD WINSTON

Do spoons play an important part in your life?

It's not something I've thought about a lot but, yes, I am quite keen on spoons.

How many spoons do you think you have?

Well, in London I imagine we have around 240. But if you include the cottage, I suppose you're looking at 300 as a round figure.

What do you mainly look for in a spoon?

It must do its job properly. In my line you rely on your instruments, and a spoon is no different. You've got to be able to depend on it.

What about the look of it? Does that matter to you?

Oh, yes. I have a set of crested Georgian spoons which were a wedding present. I really enjoy getting them out to show them to friends.

Do you have any favourite passages in literature which involve spoons?

No, but I do like that song from Mary Poppins about the spoonful of sugar. As a doctor, of course, I shouldn't approve, but I'm afraid I do! *(Laughs)*

Obviously you have a very fine collection of spoons. Who will inherit them when you die?

Frankly, I haven't yet decided. I am sure there will be plenty of time to worry about who gets my spoons when I retire.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No.

NEXT WEEK: Michael Winner

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"And a card from the staff"

World of Soccer

NO ONE WILL CATCH US NOW claims Knee

by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In The Press Box With The Drink Problem And A Complimentary Copy Of *Asian Babes*

"NEASDEN are now 120 points clear of our nearest rivals for the bottom spot in the World of Leather North Circular Relegation League."

This was the proud boast of Ron Knee, 59, the ashen-faced supremo whose club has not had a result of any kind for 51 years.

Speaking to a packed post-match press conference, following Neasden's 13-nil defeat at the hands of local rivals Dollis Hill, Knee spelled out the reasons for the club's unassailable position.

CROSSBAR

"The Squirrels have bought wisely over the years," he said. "As players died, we always replaced them, so were were never short of 11 men on the park when referee Sid Himmler blew his whistle." Ron Knee is 59.

Late Score

Lett's Diary Charity Shield

Real Paxos 9
(Netanyahu R. 1, Netanyahu B. 2, Museveni 2, Romano Prodi 1, Chirac 1, Birtwistle C.H. 1, Pevsner 1 [o.g.])

Neasden 0

MAN OF THE MATCH: Paxos' exciting No. 7 shirt Anna Kournikova.

FIFTY YEARS OF THE ARCHER

by Our Media Staff **Phil Grundy-Telegraph**

ONE of the longest-running soap operas in Britain today celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, writes our media staff Phil Grundy-Telegraph.

Set in the sleepy village of Grantchester, it centres around the character of old Jeff Archer and his wife Mary.

Over the years the story lines have dealt with the ups and downs of Jeff Archer's colourful career, including near bankruptcy, court cases with prostitutes and his long friendship with local bank manager John Major and the mad old lady in the pub, Maggie Thatch.

The Bull and Shit

But recently listeners have complained that the script-writers have stretched the audience's credibility too far.

The episode where he stole a suit in Montreal had fans protesting at its implausibility as did his abortive plan to be Mayor of Ambridge *(Surely London?)*, but in the past few months the story of Jeff putting on a play in which he stars as a man on trial whilst at the same time actually being on trial for perjury himself has proved to be the final straw. Ratings have plummeted as a result, meaning that the 50th Anniversary of The Archer may be the end for Britain's most enduring story of everyday lies. *(Surely "life"? Ed.)*

Cast In Full

The Young Jeff Archer ..... **Jeffrey Archer**
The Old Jeff Archer ..... **Jeffrey Archer**
Mary Archer ..... **Julie Andrews**
Margaret Thatcher .. **Margaret Rutherford**
Monica Coghlan ..... **Barbara Windsor**
Village Policeman ..... **Sir Brian Rix**

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letter to the Editor

SIR – Those of us who sat through the so-called television adaptation of Auberon Waugh's Sword of Brideshead novels recently can only wonder at the ignorance of today's programme makers.

Did no one tell them that during the last war officers in the 49th Halfordeers ("The Black and Deckers") did *not* salute other ranks whilst wearing their caps even when, as in the evacuation of Crete, they had exchanged their normal headgear for makeshift handkerchiefs to keep off the sun?

Also, the idea that the hero Guy Hatchback would use the modern phrase "Good evening" when addressing Lady Starborgling, the second daughter of a Marquess would be laughable if it were not indicative of a wider malaise in the country as a whole.

Brigadier Sir Hector Keegan-Gussett,
The Old Pedantry,
St Evelyn, Somerset.

HUSBAND
I'm sick of fighting, nickin' cars, stealin'..
.. I'm going to get a job and stop striving on the dole
He's been like this all week Doctor... I'm getting worried
Doctor

CASTAWAYS RETURN TO NORMAL

AFTER a year enduring appalling weather, debilitating flu and constant isolation the inhabitants of the tiny island of Britain returned to ordinary life with floods, gales and rail chaos to greet them as (cont. p94).

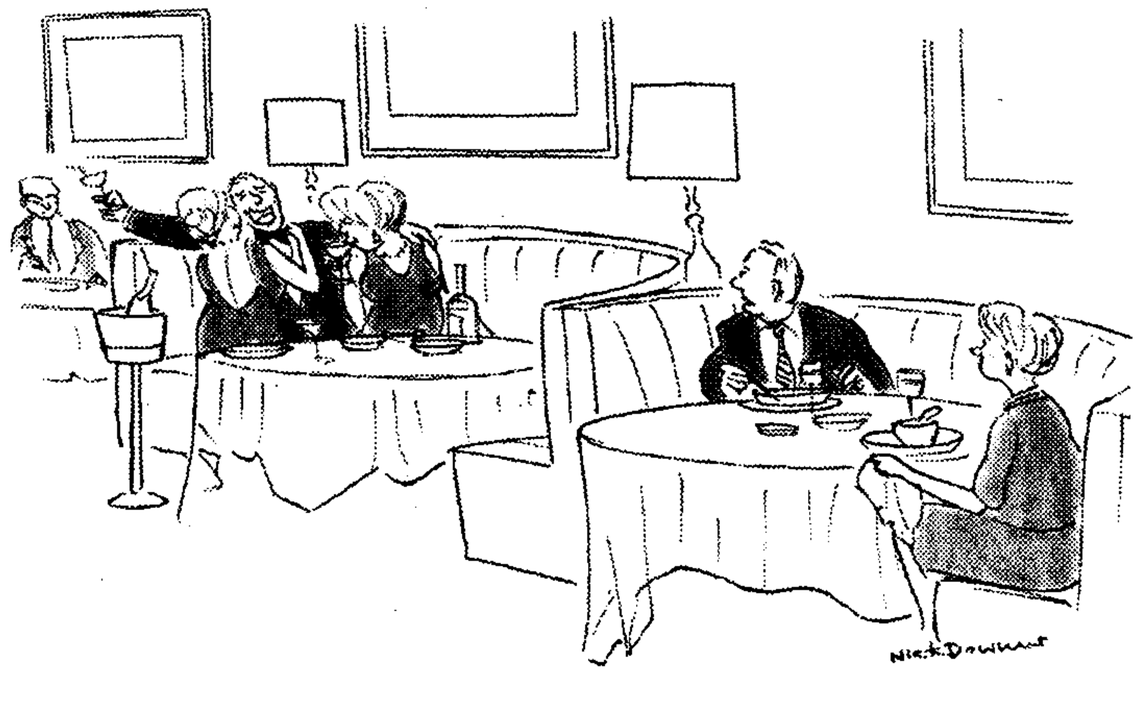
NO CAUSE FOR PANIC

There is no reason to jump to conclusions and decide that the recent unexpected cut in interest rates by Mr Alan Greenspan of the US Federal Reserve signals the beginning of a slow-down in the American economy.

It may well do but it would be irresponsible for commentators in the media to rush into print and interpret this move as indicating the start of a recession in the world's strongest economy which will inevitably lead to a disastrous global slump.

To suggest that the world is about to plunge into a catastrophic depression that will make the 1920s look like a picnic may well be true but it would be much better for sensible journalists to write nothing rather than make the situation worse by scare-mongering about a new dark age which could last at least a thousand years even if this is undoubtedly what is about to happen. Help! Help! Aargh!

© The Economics Editors of all newspapers



"Obviously a cry for help"

2001 NOW IT'S HERE

by Phil Space-Odyssey

IT IS exactly a hundred years since Kenneth C. Clarke wrote his chilling vision of the future, "2001 words by Friday, please".

(Surely "2001: A Space Odyssey"?)

So how accurate were his predictions about the way we would live in the year 1984? *(That was Orwell. Ed.)*

Some of his forecasts have proved to be entirely correct.

- **Satellites ring the planet enabling us to communicate using global video conferencing facilities.**
- **Computers dominate every aspect of our lives and without them human beings are helpless.**
- **There is a large black monolith on the moon.**

But much of what he wrote has turned out to be well wide of the mark.

- **Man has not landed on Jupiter.**
- **No one drives around in Hovercars.**
- **There is no large black monolith on the moon.**

So, all in all, Arthur C's apocalyptic vision of the future is both disturbingly prescient and comfortingly wrong. He certainly never predicted that in this year alone his film would be repeated on 2001 channels 2001 times every week and *(cont. p. 2001)*

'I Came Face To Face With Death' Says Jemima

BY OUR AERONAUTICAL STAFF
BEATRIX LEE-POTTER

A TIRED but elated Jemima Puddleduck, daughter of the late financier Sir James Puddleduck, last night spoke for the first time about her terrifying ordeal at the hands of a crazed fox.

In an exclusive interview with the Daily Telegraph, Ms Puddleduck described how she had been in the middle of a long migrating flight to central Africa when she was suddenly attacked by a large black fox.

Just as she thought her hour had come, three highly-trained dogs intervened and dragged the fox away for psychiatric tests.

"I have nothing but praise for the dogs," said Jemima. "If it wasn't for their cool courage, I would not be here today. It has taught me a great deal about life that I didn't know before, such as the fact that the Telegraph will print pages of this stuff provided you're famous."

On Other Pages Hundreds of non-famous people also survive disaster p. 94

Leicester 3 Charlton 1
Elliott was the hero, scoring along with Akinbiyi, Gunnlaugssonssonssonsson and Johanssonssonssonssonsson. There were kcs for Savage, Rowett, Oakes and Stuart and minus points for Eadie, Svenssonssonssonssonssonsson and Johanssonssonssonsson.

Daily Telegraph

20 toilet rolls, hardly used, xmas bargain, £3.50.

North West Evening Mail

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

It's a bit embarrassing, Jamie— I've gone and left my wallet in the studio.
No worries, Jake— why not just draw me something on the back of a menu? very bohemian!
CHEZ JAMIE BILL £250
PREP CRU
Sorted! So that's three more dinners you owe me!
Jake Pivot 2001

Rich Old Woman Quite ill

by Our Entire Staff

A RICH old woman was said last night to be "possibly quite ill", although this was not confirmed. *Reuters*

What Might Be Wrong With The Rich Old Woman

by Dr Thomas Stuttaford

Doctors are divided as to whether the rich old woman is suffering from a physical or a mental ailment.

In a woman of her age, it is not uncommon to be afflicted by a clinical depression. But this in turn may result from a physical illness of some kind.

Alternatively, a physical condition may well be brought on by a severe state of depression.

The Man Who Nearly Married The Rich Old Woman

by Philippa Page

IN HIS familiar wide-brimmed straw hat and pink kaftan, Lord Glenconman (formerly Colin Tennants-Lager) wipes away a tear as he recalls the golden days he spent with the rich thin woman 50 years ago when she was a thin young woman.

"She was such fun," he says. "We used to stay up all night drinking daiquiris and singing Noel Coward songs, until the sun came up over Malaria Bay."

"What do you think is wrong with her?" I asked. "Don't ask me," he replied with a twinkle. "I haven't seen the old girl for 30 years."

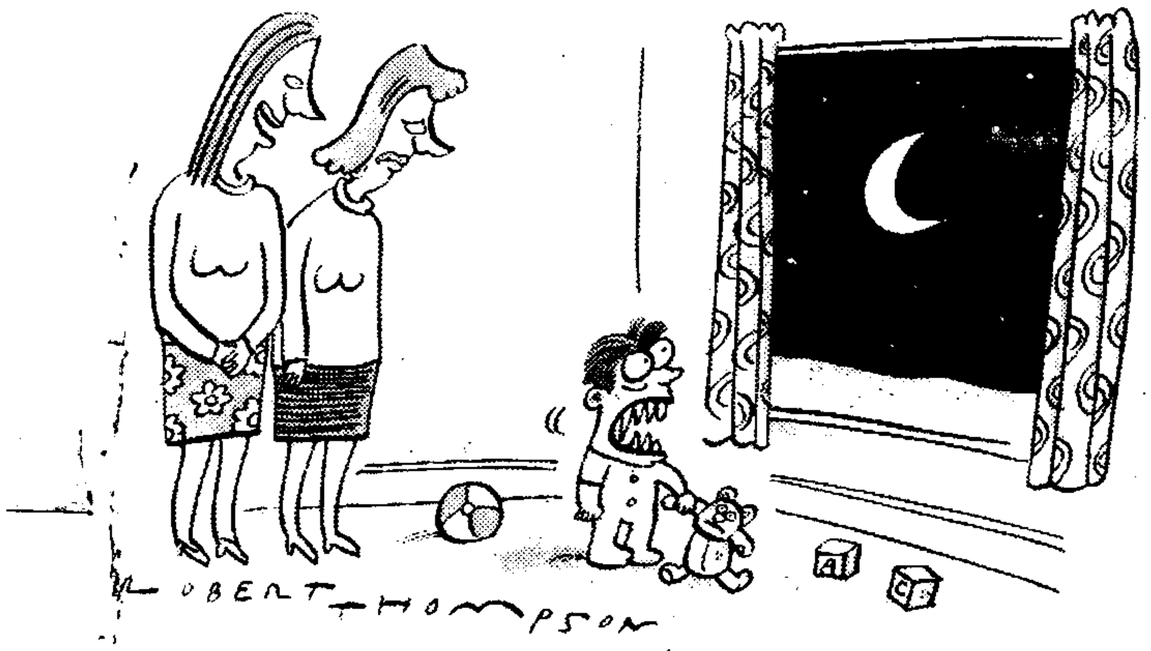
PLUS: On Other Pages

***The Princess Margaret I Never Knew**, by her best friend Lady Antonia Holden.*

EDITORIAL

A TRAGIC FIGURE

There is nationwide concern over the plight of the rich old woman. Happy childhood... radiant beauty... ill-starred romance... fairy-tale wedding... tragic divorce... Mustique... fling with gardener... 80 a day... likes a drop... jolly rude to everybody... serves her right... a nation mourns.



"Gosh, don't they change quickly"

New Year Honours

Dickie Dirt, CBE

TV comedian and star of Westward TV's Dickie Dirt Show, with his popular catchphrase "I've got a big one", has made a number of charitable donations to the Conservative Party.

Fay Corgasm, OM

NOVELIST and broadcaster, is honoured for her services to people who wet the bed at the thought of having to read one of her books

Sir Knacker Bilk

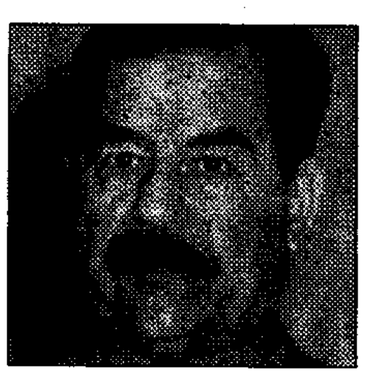
THE clarinet-playing Chief Constable of Somerset, who reached No. 52 in the charts with his 1961 hit "I've Arrested Nobody".

Bill Crasher, OBE

HAS played the role of Bob Bore in the long-running TV soap Boranation Street for 50 years. He receives his honour for services to Neil Hamilton MP.

Sir Bill Stoddy, KBE

BETTER known as "Stod" of the Western Daily Press, Sir Bill is probably most famous for his long-running strip cartoon *The Gigglers*, featuring Madge and Bill Giggler who run a caravan park near Weston-Super-Mare.



Saddam Hussein, KBE

AS an Iraqi citizen, President Hussein is not allowed to call himself "Sir", but may add the styling "KBE" to his name in official documents, such as declarations of war.

Also in the People's Honours

Sir Robert the Builder, CH, for services to the construction industry.

Lord Craig from *Big Brother*, for services to broadcasting.

Sir Guy de Ritchie, for services to Madonna.

Georgina Hristova, OM, for services to Michael Winner. *(That's enough honours. Ed.)*

Advertisement

Andersen Consulting has decided to change its name in order to seize emerging opportunities in the global market. It will now be known as

Sellafield

{ We wouldn't suggest our clients do anything we wouldn't do ourselves – such as waste huge sums of money on pointless PR. }

● Consulting ● Outsourcing ● Jargon ● Hype ● Nonsense ● Bullshit

Sellafield

Sellafield was formerly known as British Petroleum, formerly the Artist Known As Prince.

BATTLE TO KEEP DOME CLOSED

by **Simon Junkets**

THE government was last night staging a last ditch bid to keep the struggling Dome closed as various attempts were made to salvage it.

Said a government spokesman, "We have been working round the clock to come up with a proposal that people will find acceptable. And that is to ensure that the Dome never opens again."

He continued, "Popular support over the last few days has shown that the Dome has a terrific future as a property development. We just don't understand why Mr P-Y Gerbil can't see the sense in shutting it down and selling it off cheap to a mate of ours."

★★ EXTENDED AGAIN!! ★★
Lady Chatterley's
Lover
Pacific Resident Theatre • (310) 822-8392
LA Times

The Essential Labour Lover's Guide

the Joy of Chex

By LORD HAMLYN, LORD SAINSBURY and NEARLY LORD ONDAATJE

FOREPLAY

First you have to get into bed with your chosen partner, cosy up to them and slowly massage their egos. Then ask them if they would like to have chex.

THE CHEX ACT

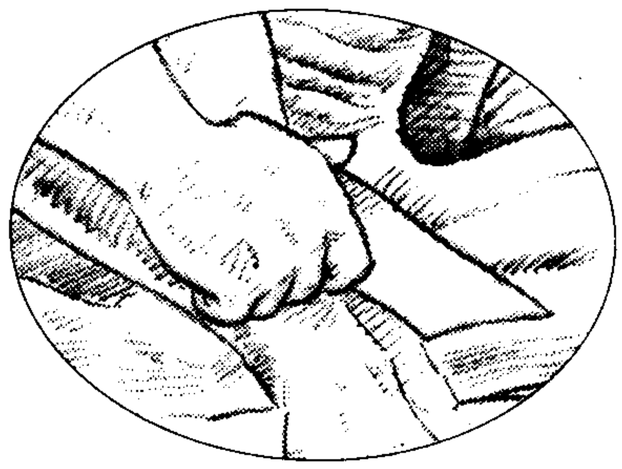
Insert "the cash" into your partner's "account" as delicately and sensitively as possible. If it is done properly, this should give them a great deal of pleasure.

SAFE CHEX

Discretion is often an integral part of a healthy chex life. So don't tell anyone except your partner what you are up to. Privacy is all important, so take precautions!

VARIATIONS

It is worth experimenting with different sorts of chex and even different partners. You may get more satisfaction by swapping partners, say from Conservative to Labour, when they are no longer in government.



BONDAGE

With your partner tied to you, you can have fun exercising power with no responsibility! You may like to get your partner on their knees or bending over backwards to do what you say.

DRESSING UP

After chex you may want to dress up in funny clothes – like an ermine robe and a coronet. Don't be embarrassed just do it!

© *Dr Alex Campbell.*

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

CASUALTY DEPT 11·15 P.M
DEDICATED TO ALL N·H·S STAFF
NOW! WILL YOU GIVE ME A MORNING AFTER PILL?
IT'S A BOY!
YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE GEORGE CLOONEY!
I'VE DRUNK TWO BOTTLES OF VODKA, TEN PINTS OF EXTRA STRONG LAGER, SOME COCAINE A BOTTLE OF VALIUM, FIFTY CO-DYDRAMOL TABLETS, A PINT OF CIDER....
I BROKE MY SHOULDER HUNTING DON'T YOU KNOW
BUT DOCTOR I ONLY TWISTED MY ANKLE ARE YOU SURE I NEED MOUTH TO MOUTH RESUSCITATION?
BREAKING THEATRE
I WAS PUTTING THE CAT OUT, WHEN A SLATE FROM THE ROOF HIT ME ON THE HEAD, I REELED BACK AND CAUGHT MY FOOT IN THE COAT RACK, FALLING OVER ONTO MY WIFE, WHO TRIPPED INTO THE BASEMENT, LANDING ON A DUSTBIN AND BREAKING HER....
RECEPTION
ZZZZZ
MY MUM SAYS CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME BREAST IMPLANTS?
FCUK YOU!
FCUK
INJUNS!
EATING LIGHT-BULBS KILLS!
REMEMBER TO ASK FOR YOUR FREE BRAIN
DO NOT PICK UP ATOMIC WASTE!
I'M ONLY HERE BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING ON TELLY
I WAS MUGGIN' THIS OLD COW WHEN I SLIPPED!
IT'S AN EMERGENCY! MY MOBILE NEEDS RECHARGIN
HI! I'M ON THE CRUTCHES
HEATH

DIARY

NORMAN LAMONT

Over the past few years, I have come to regard General Augusto Pinochet with enormous affection. His enemies portray him as a cold-blooded torturer, a man responsible for the deaths of many thousands of innocent people. But to me, what really matters is his human side: the warmth of his personal greeting, his great pride, not only in himself but in those, like me, who support him, and, of course, his extraordinary courage in the face of adversity.

At the beginning of last month, I decided to make a private visit to Chile to see some of my old friends who campaigned to have Augusto returned to his own country. "Chancellor!" they greeted me, as I got off the plane, "Chancellor! You are looking swell!"

I was struck by how, in Chile, they cling, with tears in their eyes, to the hope that I am still Chancellor of the Exchequer. It would take a hard-hearted man to disappoint them. My former colleague the unfortunate John Major is, on the other hand, to them a figure from the distant past. I am sorry to say this, but he is now totally forgotten.

Of course, in a just world, John Major would be facing charges of gross acts against humanity. I think Augusto so admires me because he sees me as a political prisoner much like himself – a man of destiny flawed by midgets. On arrival in Chile, I learned I was to be given a medal by the Pinochet Foundation, a charitable and educational organisation which gives scholarships to young men wanting to join the army, teaching them how to hold a standard drill, on the parade ground and in the stadiums, but particularly in the regions of the torso and genitalia.

Over a delicious lunch in his agreeable summer house, the General proposed my toast, and thanked me for the efforts I had made to return him to Chile. I replied simply that I needed no thanks because I had the pleasure of seeing him and the country he loved and to which he rightly belonged – and that was thanks enough. The General was visibly moved, and brought out his photograph album to show me. For half an hour, he thumbed through his treasured snaps of men, women and children in all sorts of odd positions, most of them filthy Communists hell-bent on undermining his beloved country.

The more I meet the General, the more I understand why he is loved by so many millions of Chileans. Before I left his mansion, I planted a great big kiss firmly on his lips, glorying in the marvellously bushy, almost rustic, quality of his magnificent moustaches.

Back in England, proudly sporting my medal and a delightful souvenir from the General himself – it may well be a wrist, or just possibly a child's knee – I hear with, yes, a certain feeling of pride that international businessman and company director Mr Kenneth Noye is desperate to award me with one of his very highest honours. I am to receive the Silver Medal from the Noye Foundation, an organisation which aims to stamp out selfish drivers. It is my belief that Mr Noye is a political prisoner, demonised by a brutal regime and extradited from his modest villa in his chosen homeland in the Costa del Sol. I aim to pay my respects to Kenneth early in this new year, after popping in to collect a Gold Medal, in recognition of my services to the nation as Chancellor, from my old friend and ally, Mrs Rosemary West.

Rosemary is another noted prisoner of conscience who, sadly, is now under lock and key, a victim of the Major government's politically-motivated intransigence on issues of human rights. Few in Rosemary's circle deny there may have been some tortures and brutal killings associated with her and her late husband's name, particularly of the scruffy and the irresponsible, as well as the unemployed and frankly unemployable.

But this was on a smaller scale than in many other countries, and should be seen as a consequence of a very real attempt by the Wests to tackle the problems of over-population. And unlike many more unpleasant mass-murderers, the Wests never amassed a personal fortune, preferring to live a modest, homely life in their old street, close to the minds and hearts of the people they loved.

I was worried that Mrs West might not remember me. But a broad smile greeted me as I entered her cell. "Chancellor!" she said, shaking me firmly by the hand. Old habits die hard, and I found myself reading the latest treasury predictions for the quarterly balance of payments figures out to her, reassuring her, between judicious sips of water, that the green shoots of recovery were just around the corner.

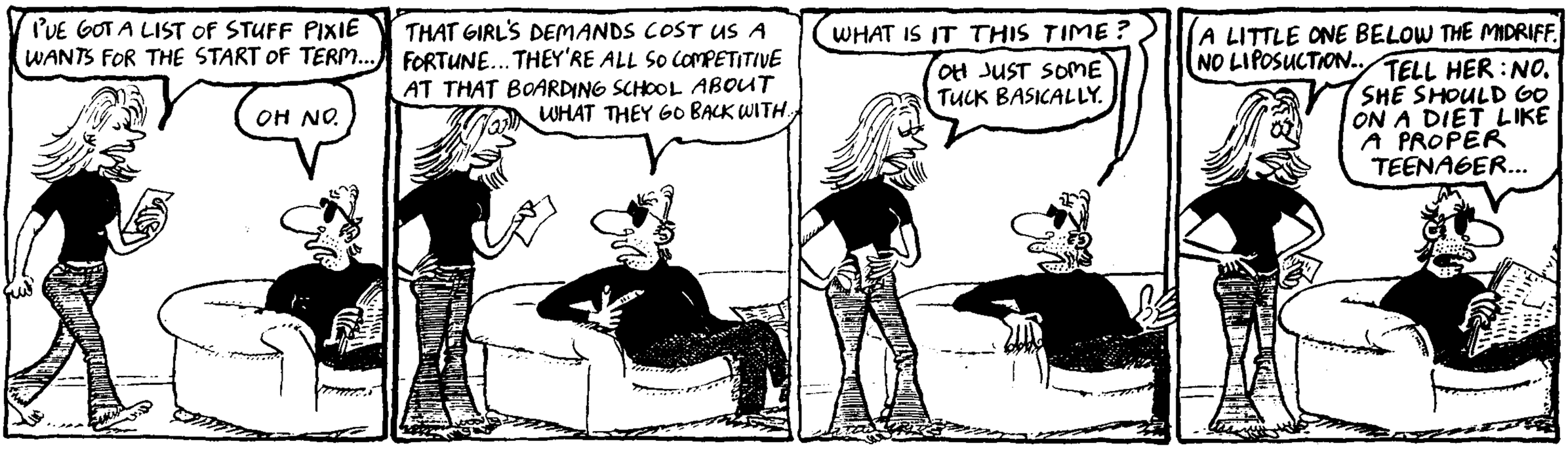
Over a light sandwich, Rosemary graciously congratulated me on my recent speeches in the Upper House, as well as my valiant support of the General. I tried to bring up the issue of legal proceedings, but my attempts were rebuffed – Rosemary wanted to talk about home cooking. She also expressed the hope that Britain would not join the Euro.

The more I meet her, the more I like her, and the more I understand why millions of ordinary Britons continue to clamour for her release. After an exchange of toasts, she performed a simple but moving ceremony in which she presented me with a gold medal from the Rosemary West Foundation – a charitable and educational organisation which gives scholarships for young men and women to learn the basics of crazy-paving. The British people only ever see politically-motivated pictures of Rosemary scowling. The real woman is completely different. She is simple, direct and immediately likeable. I felt thoroughly privileged to be able to give her a firm kiss – affectionate and moist – before bidding her a fond farewell.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I'VE GOT A LIST OF STUFF PIXIE WANTS FOR THE START OF TERM...
OH NO.
THAT GIRL'S DEMANDS COST US A FORTUNE... THEY'RE ALL SO COMPETITIVE AT THAT BOARDING SCHOOL ABOUT WHAT THEY GO BACK WITH...
WHAT IS IT THIS TIME?
OH JUST SOME TUCK BASICALLY.
A LITTLE ONE BELOW THE MIDRIFF. NO LIPOSUCTION..
TELL HER: NO. SHE SHOULD GO ON A DIET LIKE A PROPER TEENAGER...

Literary Review

Carré On and On

The Constant Gardener
John le Carré
(Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99)

SAY what you will about John le Carré, time after time the boy – make that the near-septuagenarian – shapes up. Forty years in the saddle – *Call For Death* was published as long ago as 1961 – chief fictional mount (the *Cold War*) shot from under him a decade back, but still the books keep coming. Following hard on the heels of 1999's *Single & Single, The Constant Gardener* is his second fat tome (500+ pages) in the space of a couple of years.

Actually the state of authorial panic that critics inferred from the demolition of the Berlin Wall was pretty much a red herring. Spooks, as le Carré well knows, don't disappear; they just regroup and march out into battle again under different banners. Human venality is a constant, rather like the operative – the reference is to the male lead's patrician upbringing, which allowed him to learn his horticultural techniques "from our gardeners" – of the title.

This particular exercise in human venality takes us to the parched FO community of epically corrupt and Aids-torn Kenya. Here Tess, the – let us say – volatile and idealistic young wife of languidly ineffectual Old Etonian first secretary Justin has been found in a locked jeep at a distant watering hole with her throat cut. Suspicion, activated by a pair of zealous UK police officers sent out East, initially falls on the widower (how *could* he have turned a blind eye to such a relentless catalogue of wifely failings? etc) before chancing on a trail that leads back to a particular shady multinational pharmaceutical concern and its golf-iron-toting main man Sir Kenneth K. Curtiss.

As a scenario, this has a lot to be said for it. The alien dirt. The tightly-knit expat society. The personal horror. The sink of human suffering beyond. What ails the resulting performance is, well... The thing that happens to senior novelists as they speed towards their threescore years and ten (and the rule applies to Iris Murdoch and Anthony Powell as much to Frederick Forsyth and Jack Higgins) is that they start becoming even more like themselves as writers than they were to begin with.

Graham Greene, famously, once won a prize in a *New Statesman* competition that invited a pastiched opening paragraph from one of his own books. Le Carré, you feel, could do the same. Working out where this tendency to mild self-parody kicks in isn't always easy – quality control has always been one of this author's virtues – but one can see it in the FO apparatchik Woodrow, who is more of a stuffed shirt than anyone in a novel has a right to be; in Justin's amiably reflective conversation; in the posthumous analyses of what Tess may be supposed to have stood for. Everybody is very busy here – busy revealing just a little bit more of themselves and their motivation than they could plausibly be expected to, prompt-carding the reader, jumping blindly in the roles and opportunities provided for them.

A scene in which Justin undergoes interrogation by the British coppers – oiky Rob and game Lesley – offers a fine example of this inability to know where to stop, draw a line, let the reader do some of the work. We know that Justin is concealing his knowledge of various factors that may have had a hand in his wife's death, as le Carré keeps on reminding us. Meanwhile, as Rob buffaloes away like a tabloid reporter, Lesley's female intuition saves the day. "The woman in her is wide awake listening to sounds that Rob's aggressively male ear can't catch." Got that, have you? In case you missed it, le Carré helpfully spells it out again. "And this is genius on Lesley's part: to offer him a woman's ear and a stranger's understanding..."

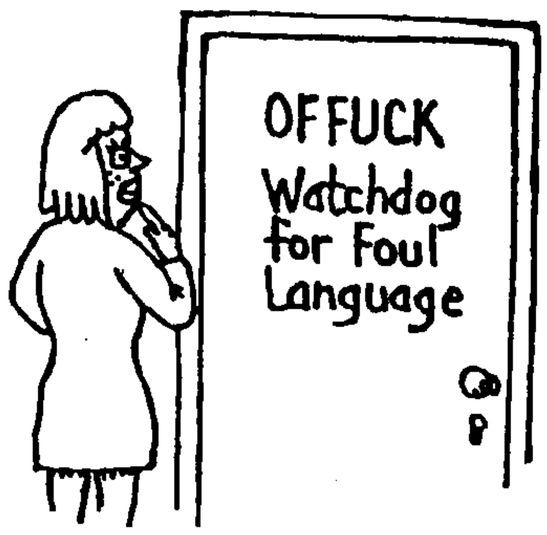
As so often in works of this kind, the constant explanations are a drag; all the customary business of the high-grade thriller played out to an accompaniment of jerked strings. No disrespect of le Carré's diligent plotting, or the righteousness of his anger at the multinational imperialists hard at work wrecking Third World lives, but what is the appeal of this sort of thing? What, to take the crudest of yardsticks, gets Professor John Sutherland booked to review it at length in the *Sunday Times*?

The answer, I suppose, is *expertise*; that eternally seductive feeling of being a glimpse into how the world, or a certain part of the world, really works. But there is nothing tangible to hand – just the burning issue, the characters grouped around it, the spectacle of the literary conjuror bringing his rather familiar-looking rabbits out of the hat.

Books & Bookmen

■ THE *Times* distinguished itself reporting the death of George Carman QC, announcing confidently that his demise "spells the loss of his anxiously awaited memoirs". The ensuing article, however, was given over to clichéd reminiscences ("...a close friend said that he 'was like the song, simply the best, better than all the rest'.") Scant mention was made of the book deal other than to say that Carperson had received a £500,000 advance from HarperCollins but that "his health deteriorated faster than expected".

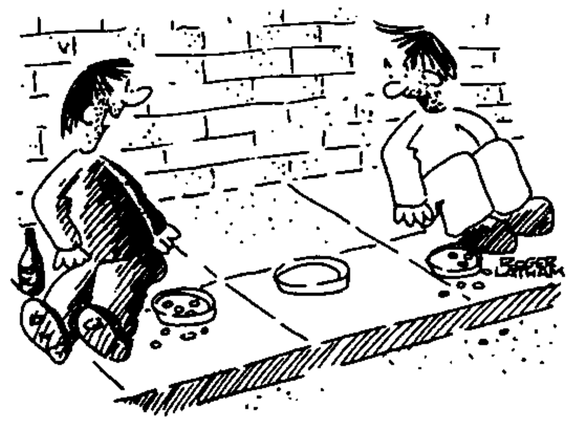
There was certainly no indication that anyone had rung his editor at HarperCollins' Fourth Estate imprint, Clive Priddle, and asked how far advanced the manuscript was, even though the publisher in question is part of a sister Murdoch company. In fact Priddle is understood to be awaiting instructions from Carman's family as to whether there is enough of a manuscript for them to proceed.



■ *AS has been expected for a while, Metro's respected publishing director Alan Brooke has finally left the company and joined the long queue of people waiting for overdue money from the publisher.*

Meanwhile, more details of Susanne McDadd and Charles Lumsden's management style emerged last week at the employment tribunal hearing for former sales manager Suzanne Collier, who was seeking her unpaid salary for June — her last month with the company. The tribunal heard that McMadd announced Collier's departure to the trade press a week before Collier herself was informed of her fate — she had been on holiday in Jerusalem when the press release was issued and the deed was not carried out until her return.

Faced with such evidence the chairman had no hesitation in finding in her favour, and ordering Metro to pay her more than £2,000 covering back salary and the loss of her company car. He also described the publisher as "vexatious" and commented that the decision to make Metro pay both sides' costs had been "irresistible".



"He's away on a course"

■ ONCE again the Nibbies — the evening of awards and book trade backslapping organised by *Publishing News* — are almost upon us.

The tedium of the proceedings has been cut by the decision to pension off MC Ned Twinky and his finely-honed set of all-weather jokes after 384 years at the helm in favour of comedian/author Tony Hawks. But the eternal question remains: How the hell are the winners decided? No one seems quite sure.

In previous years the voting has been entrusted to an "academy" of the great and good of the book world. An excruciatingly long list of its members appears each year rendered in *PN's* smallest print, although there are never any indications of the turnout of voters, still less a breakdown of their rankings and certainly none of the sideshow offered by the semi-public squabbles that happen with the Booker and the Whitbread.

In addition, quite a few academicians profess privately to having been unaware of their appointment until they get a frantic phone call from the organisers asking where their ballot paper is. Given the opacity of the process, the *Bookseller* last week wondered, not unreasonably, if the main award — that of Publisher of the Year — was not allotted on the basis of "Buggins' turn". It didn't mention, however, the mutterings of the truly uncharitable, who have devoted many man-hours to the task of trying to establish a link between the winner and their level of advertising expenditure in *PN* over the previous year.

'Bookworm'

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
THERE'S NO DOUBT SHE'S BRILLIANT AT WRITING FANTASY
J.K. ROWLING
HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE
NO WONDER THE LABOUR PARTY WANT HER ON BOARD

IN THE BACK

CELL MATES

THE refusal to hold a public inquiry into the murder of Zahid Mubarek by a known racist psychopath in Feltham young offenders' institute comes as no surprise to the parents of Christopher Edwards – a young man who died in almost identical circumstances six years earlier.

Paul and Audrey Edwards are still trying to find out how their son came to be locked up in Chelmsford jail with a known violent paranoid schizophrenic and why apparent attempts at raising the alarm went unanswered when he was attacked. Christopher was so badly mutilated he had to be formally identified by his teeth.

Mr and Mrs Edwards' attempt to bring the authorities to book is still wending its way through the European court of human rights. Within the next month they are also expecting the results of the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) investigation into Essex police's handling of their son's murder. They hope both will shed light on the affair and bring about changes that will prevent another tragedy.

Christopher should not have been in jail in the first place. A gifted child, a brilliant economics student and a Japanese speaker to boot, he had once seemed destined for great things. But in his 20s he was struck by mental illness. He withdrew into himself; became obsessed with religion and dropped out.

Christopher had been prescribed anti-psychotic drugs, but unwilling to accept his illness he refused to take them. Then one day in November 1994 he suddenly decided he wanted a wife and family. He approached two women and asked them to take him home with them. He was arrested for causing a breach of the peace.

Christopher Edwards

Despite his bizarre behaviour in court and at the police station, magistrates remanded Christopher to Chelmsford prison rather than to a psychiatric hospital. He was put in a cell with Richard Linford: a man with long history of mental illness, hallucinations and violence, and who should never have been in a jail either, let alone sharing an unsupervised cell. Five hours later Christopher was dead. One of his ears was never found. It was presumed eaten.

Though a long inquiry into the murder by the prison service, Essex county council and North Essex health authority catalogued "disastrous deficiencies on a multitude of issues" by all the agencies serving the mentally ill, the Edwards criticised serious gaps in the investigation – particularly concerning the prison service.

For example, it did not explore the silencing of the cell alarms. It did not thoroughly explore why an initial assessment that Linford "wasn't fit to go in with other inmates" because he had been violent earlier in the day was ignored; and nor why Christopher Edwards was chosen as his cell mate. Crucially it did not explore in any depth the delay in getting help to Christopher when noises were heard coming from the cell. Six officers saw Linford jumping on him, but they left to put on riot gear before returning to rescue him.

The investigation was not a public inquiry. It had no official powers to call witnesses and the family was not represented. Official accounts went largely unchallenged.

Mr Edwards said at the time of the inquiry that while the report gave a lengthy summary of the blunders that had led to their son's death "there was no sense of outrage for such a disgraceful level of failure". He said: "The acceptance of the tragic inevitability of failure is the breeding ground for future tragedies – not for initiatives that will lead to major improvements."

How right he was. One of the main recommendations was that a risk assessment must always be made every time a decision is taken to place two inmates in a cell together. No such assessment took place before 19-year-old Zahid Mubarek was placed in a cell at Feltham with Robert Stewart, the man with a known severe personality disorder and hatred for non-whites, who battered him to death.

● ONE issue that greatly disturbed the Edwards was the way the prison service seriously misled them. It took nearly five years to finally nail the lies.

Though the parliamentary ombudsman rejected their claim that there had been a deliberate cover-up, saying there had been a "misinterpretation", he did damn the prison service. He said it had "allowed that misinterpretation to go to a considerable extent uncorrected, despite the fact that their internal inquiry report on the incident had clearly indicated that a significantly different explanation was in order. The effect had been to maintain a false impression concerning the possible extent of the prison service's culpability..."

What had happened was this. Ten days after Christopher's death the family was told in a letter from the prison service's then director general Derek Lewis that Christopher had been locked up with Linford because they had struck up an immediate friendship in the prison reception area and did not want to be separated.

This simply didn't ring true to the Edwards, who had coped with their son's illness for more than four years. A feature of it was his inability to form relationships with anybody.

In fact Christopher had already been placed in a cell on D wing when Linford arrived at the jail, displaying facial injuries and said to have been fighting in the police van. A decision was taken by staff to place Linford on the wing while awaiting reception interviews because they did not want him remaining in the reception area "given the nature of his injuries". If not evident to everyone beforehand, it certainly was by the time the internal inquiry report was circulated to managers on 16 December.

The family asked to see the report. This was refused by area manager Tom Murtagh, who assured them in January that "no serious defects were revealed". He said the family had already been given an account of what had happened in the reception area and "there is nothing more that I can add to those letters about what happened".

PS: Though the ombudsman forced the prison service to apologise for the continuing "misinformation" and to release the internal report, no one has ever been disciplined. The only person to face sanctions was Chelmsford prison's medical officer.

PPS: Tom Murtagh is well known to *Eye* readers as the area manager behind the bungled raid on Blantyre House jail and the subsequent "misinformation" circulated about it afterwards.

ROUGH JUSTICE

AFTER a long struggle for justice since his wife was knocked down on a zebra crossing and left with devastating injuries (*Eye* 993), for the consul general for Eritrea, Abraha Afewerki, the end at last appeared to be in sight last month. Two London police officers accused of failing to investigate the crash properly were finally to face a full disciplinary hearing.

Mr Afewerki's wife Fatima, 35, a mother of two and a talented singer and dancer, had been left almost totally paralysed with just limited use of one hand. Yet as a result of their inaction, the driver of the car that hit her, Joan Burdett-Coutts, a relative of the up-market banking family, escaped without so much as an interview under caution. Mr Afewerki is convinced that had his wife been white and the driver of the car black, the investigation would have run very differently.

Although the Police Complaints Authority dismissed his claims of racism, it did reveal a catalogue of failure and "lack of sensitivity". For example, there was little or no attempt to trace witnesses – not even the man who dialled 999; a decision not to prosecute had been taken before the expert accident report had been concluded; no formal statement was ever taken from Mrs Burdett-Coutts; and Fatima was only interviewed after her husband complained. By this time – two and half years after the accident – it was too late to bring charges.

At the police disciplinary hearing Mr Afewerki gave evidence and was allowed to sit through four days of evidence believing it to be damning. But on day five he was asked to leave. The two officers, Superintendent John Beverley and Sergeant Richard Boddy, had apparently asked to change their not guilty pleas to limited admissions of neglect.

No one, though, would tell Mr Afewerki the outcome. The *Eye* learnt that the sergeant was "reprimanded", given a ticking off, and the superintendent was fined. But we could not find out how much.

Mr Afewerki is concerned that the full hearing on all issues never went ahead and that it ended in a secret plea bargain. As a result of the initial bungled police investigation, Mrs Burdett-Coutts' insurers had initially refused to pay any compensation, putting the family in extreme financial and physical difficulties in caring for Fatima's special needs.

Again Mr Afewerki has received little satisfaction from the Met, which would not even "formally confirm" the penalties. A letter from Supt Philip Gough, of the directorate of professional standards, says: "I am sorry that the Metropolitan Police Service may appear to have missed another opportunity of being open, honest and transparent." Quite.

SCHOOLS FOR SCANDAL

WHEN W.S. Atkins won the multimillion pound contract to run schools in the London borough of Southwark, it had to admit that its only experience in education administration was running one rather dilapidated school bus and taking part in half a school-building PFI scheme. So where was it to get the experience it needed to run the entire education of a large London borough? The answer was obvious: from the council.

One man who knew a lot about schools improvement in the borough was Steve Davis, who had just moved from Havering council for a salary of £60,000 a year. A few days after his appointment to his new job, Mr Davis got another one – with W.S. Atkins as an adviser on schools improvement, at a salary of £100,000 a year. A few days later the council proudly announced the winner of the contract to run all its schools: er, W.S. Atkins.

In October Mr Davis was on the move again – back to Southwark council, where he was put in charge of, er, schools improvement. In an unusual arrangement his salary is paid by W.S. Atkins. Generously the council has agreed to "reimburse" W.S. Atkins for Mr Davis's salary. Thus, after much shunting between public and private enterprise, Mr Davis finds himself back in his old job with the huge increase in his salary paid by the council.

PS: As *Eye* readers will recall (1007), the man in charge of education policy and resources at Southwark is Mr Andrew Turner, who is supremely well qualified for his job. In the bad old days of the Tory government, he was a dedicated full-time worker for the Tory front organisation Choice, where he masterminded the schools privatisation policies of the former Tory government. He managed to wrench a few privatised crumbs from the then publicly-owned and controlled local authority schools. Neither he nor his Tory bosses would have dared even to suggest such a drastic and (for council taxpayers) expensive scheme of wholesale schools privatisation such as that now sponsored by "new" Labour (and run by an Old Tory) in Southwark.

LOCKERBIE: THE KHREESAT CONNECTION

AS reported in the last *Eye*, the trial in Holland of two Libyans for the bombing of Pan Am airliner 103 over Lockerbie 13 years ago has been delayed for several weeks. The reason? An attempt by defence lawyers to get more information from the Syrian government about a terrorist formerly with the Palestinian group PFLP-GC.

The terrorist, who has since died, is usually known by the name of Mobdi Goben. He was named, incidentally, during one of the most remarkable episodes in the trial so far: the evidence of a former FBI agent called Edward Marshman.

In November 1989, nearly a year after the bombing, Mr Marshman was sent by the FBI to Jordan where he interviewed an undercover Jordanian intelligence agent called Marwan Khreesat. The interview was possible only because of the close contacts over many years between Jordanian intelligence and the American CIA.

Edward Marshman

The Dumfries and Galloway police, officially in charge of the Lockerbie murder inquiry, were most upset when they discovered that the FBI had got to Khreesat before them. Khreesat has been named many times in western media as the man who may have made the "improvised explosive device" (bomb) which went off in the airliner on 21 December 1988, killing all passengers and crew.

Few if any of the western commentators who named Khreesat realised that he was so closely connected to Jordanian intelligence. But when the FBI started to investigate the theory that Palestinian terrorists had blown up the airliner on the orders of the Iranian and Syrian governments, Mr Marshman was sent to Amman to interview Khreesat. When Jordanian intelligence chiefs adamantly refused to release Khreesat for the Lockerbie trial last year, Mr Marshman was summoned to disclose what Khreesat told him all those years ago. Under questioning on 5 December, Mr Marshman told the following story.

On October 13 1988, two months before the Lockerbie bombing, Khreesat, who had infiltrated the PFLP and was respected in the organisation as an expert with high explosives, travelled from Jordan to Germany with his wife. The couple were met by a PFLP terrorist called Dalkamoni, who told Khreesat he was expecting another PFLP contact, whom he named as Abu Elias. When Khreesat asked what role Elias would play in the PFLP's terrorist plot, he was told that Elias was an expert in airport security, while Khreesat was an expert in making bombs. The plan was for Khreesat to make bombs and for Elias to smuggle them on to an aircraft.

On 22 October Khreesat saw his wife off on a plane back to Jordan — from Frankfurt airport, where he spent some time researching plane schedules. That evening, in a house owned by another PFLP member, Khreesat started making five bombs and disguising them so that they could be put on an aircraft. Khreesat told Marshman that he did "not know any of the details as to exactly how the devices were going to be put on board aircraft... Elias had all the details".

On 24 October, Khreesat's story went on, he stopped work for a break. While he was in the shower, Dalkamoni knocked on the door and said he was leaving to go to Frankfurt. When Khreesat got back to his work, he noticed that one of the five bombs had disappeared. The next day, 25 October, he phoned his controlling officer in Jordanian intelligence with the news that he had made the bombs and that one of them had been passed on to Elias. Later that day, Khreesat and Dalkamoni went to Dussseldorf airport where they wandered round picking up timetables and discussing airline schedules. The next day still, 26 October, Khreesat and Dalkamoni left their home to go to meet Elias. Their car, with a bomb inside, was stopped by German police and the two men were arrested. As soon as the German police verified that Khreesat was an intelligence agent from Jordan he was released.

Neither Marshman nor Khreesat nor anyone else could say what happened to the bomb that went missing while Khreesat was in the shower except that it was disguised as a Toshiba cassette recorder (as was the Lockerbie bomb). Marshman's official note of the interview concluded: "Khreesat advised that he does not think he built the device responsible for Pan Am 103, as he only built the four devices in Germany which are described herein". But this is nonsense. "Described herein" were not four, but five devices, and the missing one was disguised as a Toshiba.

Mr Marshman's evidence was heard out of sequence. He was a witness for the defence and was questioned first by William Taylor QC for al Megrahi, the first defendant. Mr Turnbull for the prosecution followed with a line of questions designed to prove that Khreesat did not make the bomb that brought down Pan Am 103. But his questions did not even start to shape the main point: that a few weeks before the Lockerbie bombing a gang working ostensibly for Palestinian terrorists, but mostly for various intelligence services, were busily building bombs disguised as cassettes and intended for planting on aircraft at Frankfurt airport from which the doomed flight 103 took off. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Mr Marshman's evidence was that neither he nor Mr Khreesat ever once mentioned the Libyan government or Malta airport or anyone employed by either.

POLICE 5

THE rule that runs like a golden thread through the British police and the crown prosecution service (CPS) – that no police officer must ever be punished for making a hash of celebrated criminal cases – has been triumphantly sustained in the case of the M25 murder and robberies.

The case was decided by the court of appeal last July, and the three convicted men were released. In their judgment, the three judges referred to the fact, first disclosed in the *Eye* last year: that a main prosecution witness against the three men, Norman Duncan, was a police informer who gave his evidence without disclosing that he was an informer, or that he was engaged for two days after the murder in secret discussions, including a 38-minute interview, with Surrey police officers.

This worried the judges, who set out their concerns as follows:

"Duncan told the jury that he was not arrested until 22 December. He did not tell the jury anything about his earlier sojourn at Reigate police station. Because he was concealing his status as an informant he was also forced to lie about what had taken place in the 38-minute interview. That could only have been in collusion with the police. It amounts to no less than a conspiracy to give perjured evidence... We find the fact profoundly disturbing. It must dent the credibility both of Duncan and the police officers directly involved."

Intrigued by this unequivocal statement, the solicitor for the three defendants, Jim Nichol, wrote to Surrey police to ask what action would be taken against the police officers engaged in what the court of appeal had described as nothing less than a conspiracy to commit perjury. The answer came just before Christmas from Peter Fahy, assistant chief constable of Surrey police.

He wrote: "The force has considered the judgment at great length and has sought advice from the crown prosecution service as to the reasons why the court made the particular comments you have highlighted. Surrey police has always cooperated fully with the work of the criminal cases review commission and with Greater Manchester police who carried out the investigation on behalf of the commission. At the conclusion of their exhaustive enquiries, the report from Greater Manchester stated that they did not 'discover anything to suggest that police entered into corrupt dealings with accomplices Jobbins, Griffin, Duncan and/or Roberts in order to secure their convictions'... There is no new evidence that was not considered by Greater Manchester which would justify Surrey police having these matters investigated again. We fully respect the court of appeal's judgment, but any new complaint investigation would have to rely on the same evidence that was available to the Greater Manchester team."

A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR...

THE Medicines Control Agency was deeply shocked by criticism of the appointment of its new director, Dr Ian Hudson, a former top executive of the country's biggest drugs company, SmithKline Beecham. The suggestion, said a spokesman, that the agency was falling into the hands of the industry it was supposed to be regulating, was "outrageous".

As "new" Labour ministers constantly point out, the best people to run government agencies are people who have made it in the industry. And the clearest proof of success in the drugs trade is the recent merger between its two giants: SmithKline Beecham and Glaxo Wellcome.

Professor H. Dargie

Professor J. Chipman

Professor B. Park

Further support for this argument comes from the government's top medicines watchdog, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), now almost completely dominated by beneficiaries of the medicines industry. Prof J. Chipman, for instance, benefits from research grants from Glaxo Wellcome and SmithKline Beecham. So does Professor J. Darbyshire. Professor H. Dargie has a consultancy with SmithKline Beecham for whom he has carried out a clinical trial. Dr M. Donaghy has shares in both companies, while Dr B. Evans gets fees from SmithKline Beecham and has some shares in the company as well, to balance the shares he also holds in Glaxo Wellcome.

Dr J.C. Forfar has shares in Glaxo Wellcome and Dr A. McGowan has a consultancy and a fellowship with the firm. They fit nicely with his consultancy and his fellowship with SmithKline Beecham. Prof B. Park has "fellowships" from Glaxo Wellcome and a "lectureship" with SmithKline Beecham. Prof J.F. Smyth has carried out clinical trials for SmithKline Beecham, and also declares "occasional meetings" with the company. Prof I. Weller has carried out "trials and study" for both companies, and Prof K. Woodhouse has carried out clinical research trials for SmithKline Beecham.

There are plenty of other drug companies in which CSM members declare their interests. The 37 members of the committee claim 82 "personal interests" (shares, consultancies, etc) and 106 non-personal interests (clinical trials, research grants, etc). Ten of the 37 have an interest in the newly-merged monstrosity at the top of the trade. What better vindication could there be of the "new" Labour slogan that the best qualified gamekeepers are always to be found among the poachers?

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

ONE of the most troubling aspects of the Equitable Life scandal is the reinsurance policy that not only failed to insure that the world's oldest insurer did not topple into a multi-billion "black hole" but also persuaded Equitable's auditors, the Financial Services Authority and the Treasury to confidently permit the society to carry on selling new pension policies even when it could not meet its obligations under the old ones.

The reinsurance policy was taken out with Employers Re during 1998 after the Treasury changed the rules making pension companies provide fully for the possible full take-up of guaranteed annuities in a period of falling interest and annuity rates.

It was supposed to insure Equitable against at least half of its estimated £1.6bn liability under existing guaranteed annuity rate policies.

But Equitable then used this "cover" to write back £700m into its balance sheet, thereby allowing the auditors and regulators to attest that all was fine and it could carry on selling. The company was not insolvent because it could meet the guaranteed annuity liabilities as and when they fell due either from reserves or the Employers Re policy.

Equitable claimed only a fraction of the policyholders with these high annuity rate pensions would take them up, even though they were providing double digit returns when inflation was low and current annuity contracts might only pay half as much. This was another piece of self deception which auditors and regulators allowed Equitable to perpetuate thereby lulling a million policyholders into a sense of totally false security.

The excuse now from the FSA and the Treasury is that "everything changed" once the Law Lords ruled last year that Equitable had to pay up on its guarantee. But that just doesn't wash.

Equitable's dishonourable belief that it could renege on guarantees given years before to thousands of policyholders was only upheld when first tested in the courts in September 1999. It was not surprisingly rejected by a majority in the Court of Appeal a year ago. From that moment on Equitable knew its gamble was likely to fail – as it did in July when the Law Lords agreed with the Court of Appeal. Seven judges said Equitable was wrong both legally and morally. Only two ever said it was right.

But the impact of that ruling appears to have been that the reinsurance cover was then removed by Employers Re, plunging Equitable into a financial abyss. Why? Of what use was the reinsurance if it only paid out if it wasn't needed?

Insurers of course are lovers, if not inventors, of loopholes. Indeed, where none exist they will quickly create them in order to avoid paying out. As Equitable itself has done.

So on what basis did Employers Re agree to write the reinsurance contract for Equitable? Was it only on the basis of the society's flawed legal advice that the contract was not the contract – defying a hallowed tenet of British law – and that a guarantee was not a guarantee if there was a discretion to chose something less costly?

If so then it would be astounding that this so called reinsurance was accepted as sufficient to justify Equitable's solvency by either the auditors or the regulators. It is particularly inexplicable that the reinsurance contract continued to be relied upon after the Appeal Court decision holed Equitable's position below the waterline – 10 months before the society closed to new business. Yet it was, by Ernst & Young for the 1999 accounts sent to policyholders last April and by the FSA. The case for mis-selling and failure to regulate or protect investors is hard to deny after the Appeal Court decision and irresistible after the Law Lords confirmed it.

At the end of every court case half the legal advice is worthless. So to base survival on such a risky concept seems incredible, not just for the Equitable directors sleep-walking their way to extinction but even more for the supposed City watchdogs and "Mr Prudence", Chancellor Gordon Brown.

This is doubly so as the top Treasury official in charge of insurance companies had "serious questions" about Equitable's solvency in November 1998 and found the directors' assurances – which presumably included the Employers Re cover – "unconvincing". Once Equitable's legal case had been rejected by the Appeal Court, thereby jeopardising the reinsurance lifeline, why did the Treasury not insist that the insurance industry launch a lifeboat – as had been done for sinking banks and building societies in the past – while Equitable still had a business to save?

An alternative possibility regarding the non-reinsurance reinsurance is that it was terminated for failure to disclose material facts. That mother of all loopholes has been relied on by insurers and reinsurers since Lloyd's was a coffee house. Were Employers Re able to walk away because Equitable had also failed to fully disclose to them the true position under the guaranteed annuities? After all, what was once estimated to be a potential bill of £1.6bn had grown to £3bn and rising by the time the man from the Pru walked away last month, the last of more than half a dozen big insurers who decided not to buy Equitable because of its "black hole".

If so then the "crimes" of chairman John Sclater and chief executive Alan Nash – whether committed from hubris, ignorance or stupidity – are even greater than they already appear.

The Commons treasury select committee investigation into Equitable must discover what happened to the incredible disappearing reinsurance contract which prompted the latest debacle for City regulation. They also need to examine the inaction of the FSA and the extent to which the Treasury, the FSA and Ernst & Young would not or preferred not to see that they were being lead by those who knew but refused to look - the directors of Equitable Life.

Spurred on by Tony Blair, the Thatcher government was forced to compensate the victims of Barlow Clowes because its regulatory poodle, the Department of Timidity & Inaction, failed to close down the company. Barlow Clowes offered high return, higher risk investments. Equitable Life with-profit policyholders were in the antithesis of the risk business. That is why the Treasury may find it hard to resist pressure either to arrange a rescue or to face a demand for compensation. With a million households involved and an election looming Labour MPs could soon be feeling the Equitable effect.

TOMKINS' chairman David Newlands continues to distinguish himself as a champion of manager's rights over owners/shareholders' rights. First he allows former chief executive Greg Hutchings to treat Tomkins like a personal piggy bank. Now he refuses to reveal to shareholders the extent of Hutchings' personal perks and who approved the penthouses, planes, gifts and jobs for wives and housekeepers.

The independent report by accountants Ernst & Young is held to be "defamatory". Of who? Hutchings, or those who allowed dictator Greg to get away with milking the company for so long? Hutchings predictably outmanoeuvred Newlands by announcing that he had been "cleared" by the report and was demanding £5m compensation for loss of office.

No wonder Tomkins' brokers Cazenove agreed Newlands had to go when they were supporting the aborted shareholders' coup last year before switching sides. They also backed the removal of non-executives Ali Wambold and Roger Holland as well as company secretary Richard Marchant. All doubtless star in the E&Y report.

Every abuse of the Tomkins purse must have been approved by someone, or could be considered to have been. The questions are how, why and by who – and were those decisions correct? Until Tomkins share-holders know the answers to those questions – to be found in the report – corporate governance is still missing. What are Newlands and the rest of Hutchings' ex-cronies on the board afraid of? A Hutchings writ… or exposure of their own culpability?

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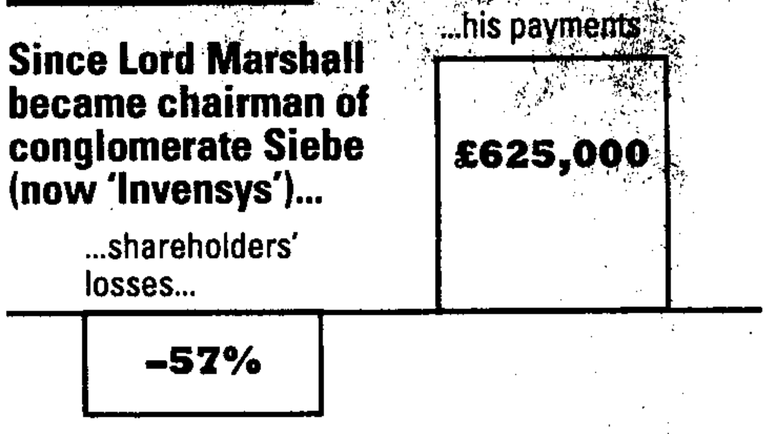

WHAT a surprise that *Sunday Times* business editor John Jay should quit to join fund manager John Duffield. Jay had only been "puffing" Duffield since he was at the *Sunday Torygraph* back in 1992. He loyally backed Duffield in his legal battle with Commerzbank over control of Jupiter Asset Management. Indeed his last "boost" (26 November) commemorated Duffield's "coup" in beating the Germans while elsewhere there was a full page devoted to his hero. Three weeks later Jay was on Duffield's payroll at New Star Asset Management. That's what friends are for!

HERE are the Gnome Institute for Greed Management's 1999 awards for achievements in white collar crime and fantasy finance.

Conmen of the Year – John Sclater and Alan Nash of Equitable Life, whose successes in fooling so many for so long were unrivalled.

Newcomers of the year – all those dot.com wannabees and their City advisors for taking so much from so many for so little.

Comebacks of the Year – David Mayhew of Cazenove and Anthony Salz of lawyers Freshfields for proving Guinness is good for some.

Escaper of the Year – Peter aka Beth Young for creating a new fashion: when guilty get into a dress.

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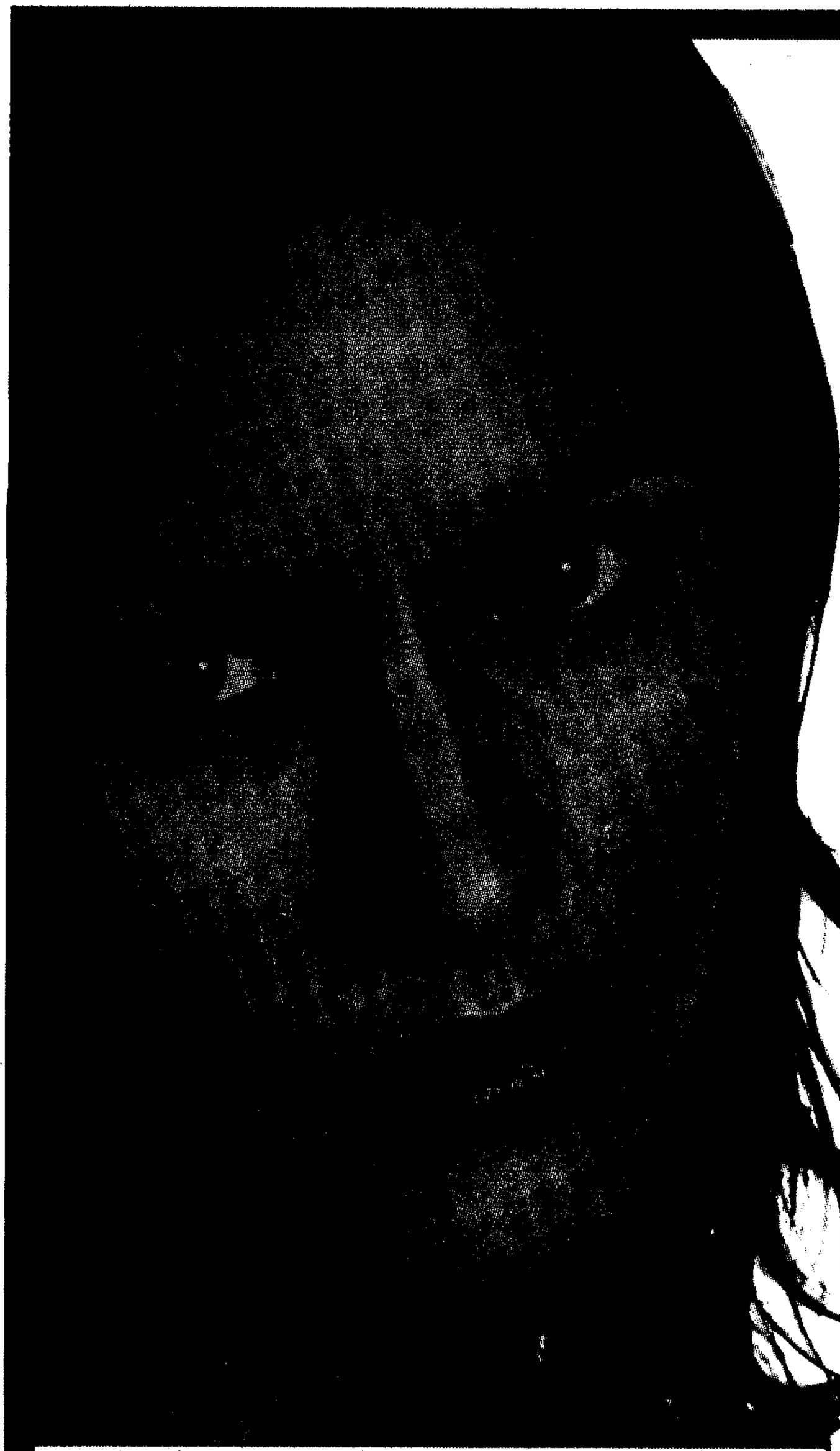

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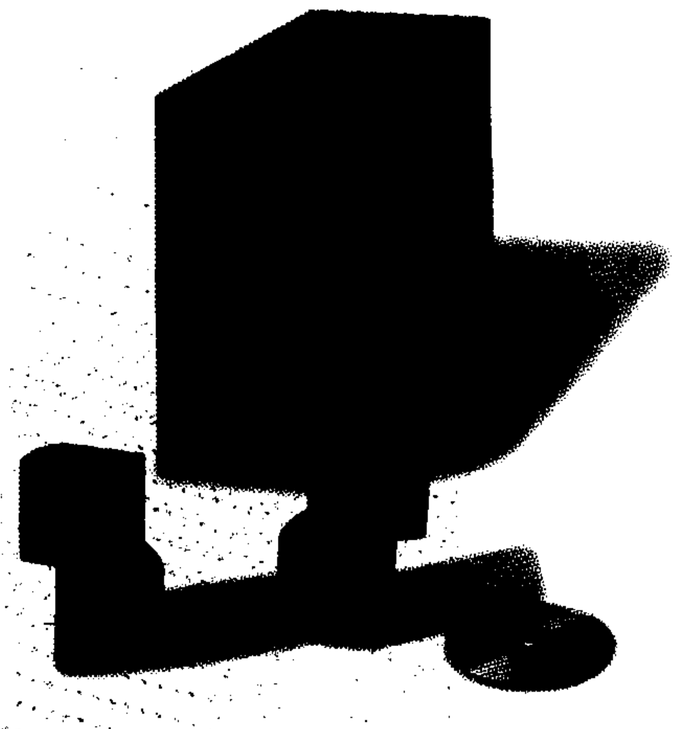

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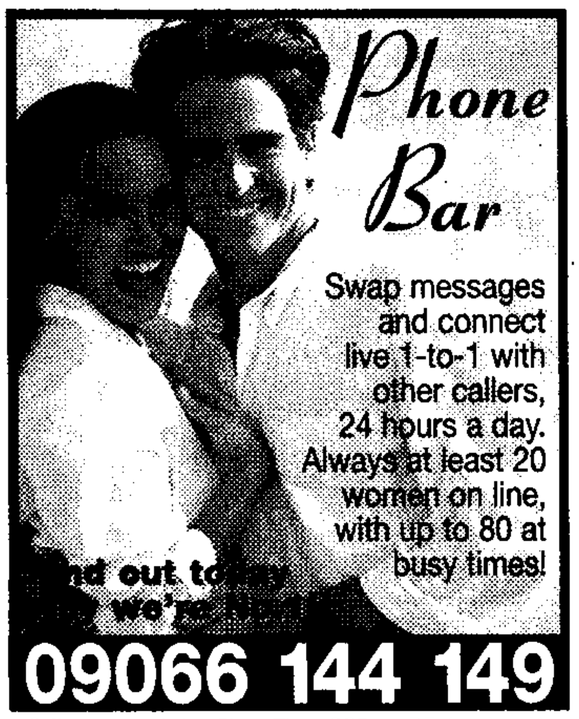
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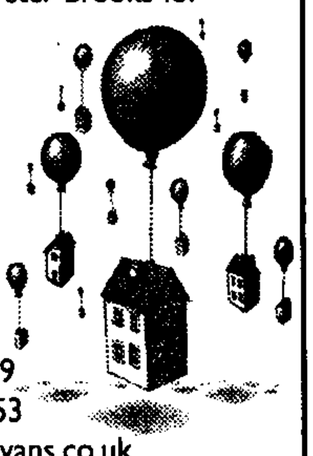

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IMAGINATIVE painter needs canvasses, oils, brushes, easel, enlarging projector – 020 8374 3924.

NATURAL HEALER needs financial assistance, offers healing in return. Telephone 1470 020 8883 7612.

MS SUFFERER desperately needs funds for treatment to limit progression of disability. NHS won't help. Can you? Dr's letter available. Please help. christopher.tinsley@virgin.net NATIONWIDE 070030 80249377.

I BADLY NEED MONEY, but tell me what YOUR problem is, I have a massively above average chance of helping. E-mail Bill@primalspirit.net

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ADDITIONS – 'ATTACHED' Discreet Loving Agency for married people. 020 8905 3304, 020 8958 9657. Established 1992.

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GET YOUR COAT love – you've pulled. Mike.S99 @lineone.net

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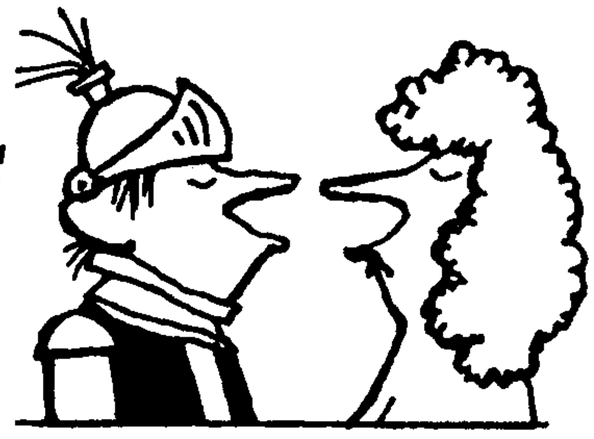

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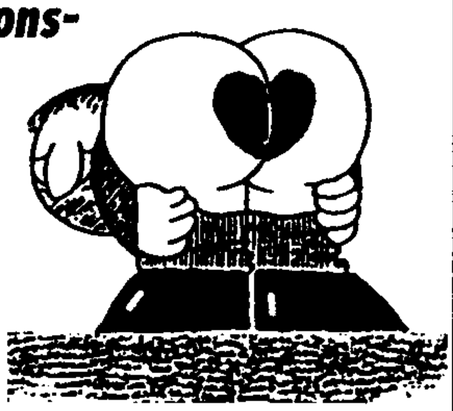

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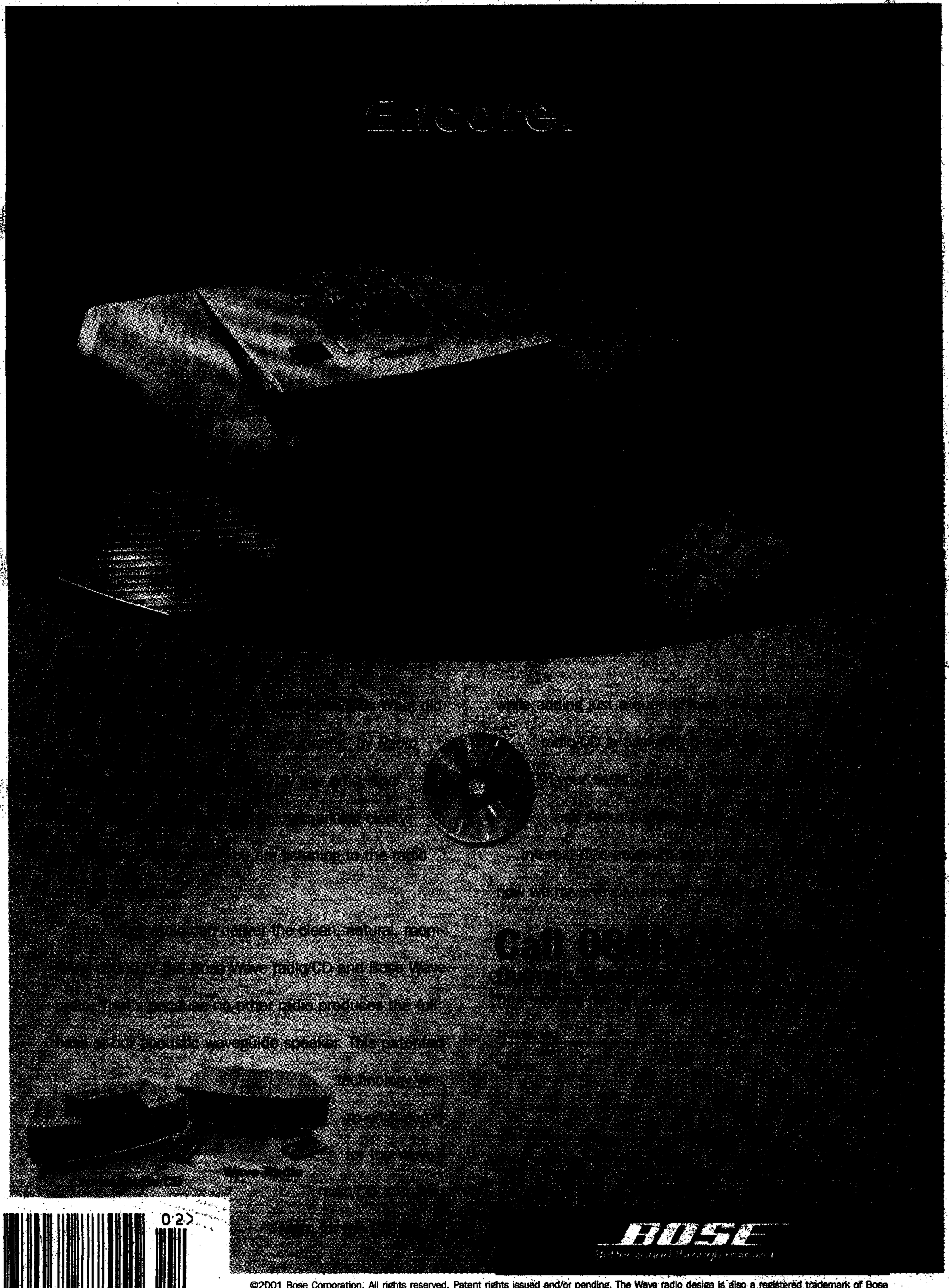

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